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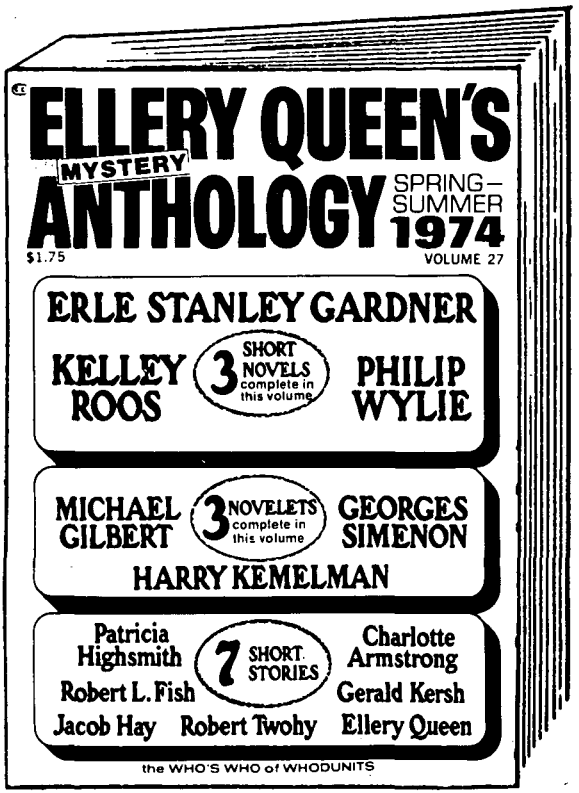

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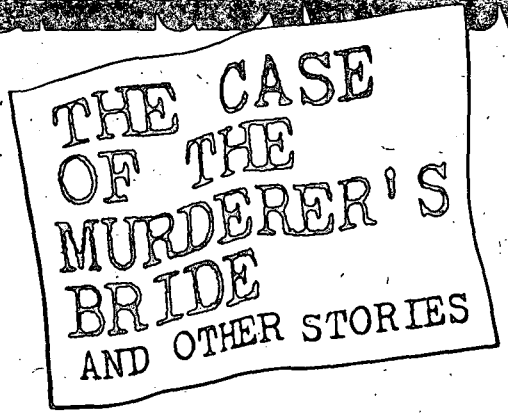

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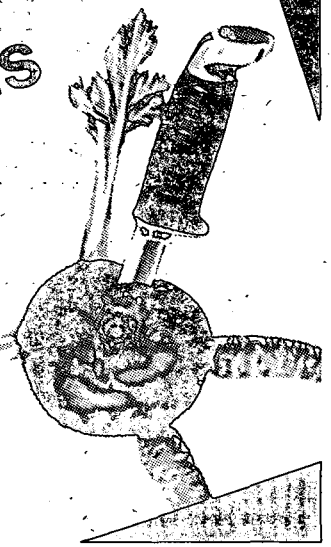

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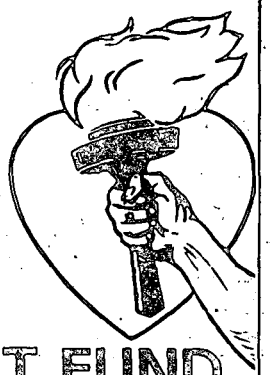

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THEY'LL KILL THE LADY

by HUGH PENTECOST

Many people in the New England town of Lakeview thought of George Crowder as a "character." As a young man George Crowder must have been Adonis-handsome. Now in his late fifties Uncle George, as he was affectionately known in the community, was iron-gray, with deep lines at the corners of his firm mouth and crow's-feet at the eyes, etched there by good humor and compassion.

Long ago George Crowder had been a brilliant lawyer, the county prosecutor, with a political future that seemed to have no limits. But there had come a day when George Crowder had convicted a man on a murder charge, seen him executed by the state, then discovered that the man had been innocent.

George Crowder took full blame for this miscarriage of justice even though no one else believed he'd been at fault. He had prosecuted on the basis of evidence provided by the police—wrong evidence. He resigned his post as prosecutor, dropped the practice of law entirely, and disappeared from Lakeview. No one knew what had happened to him, not even his sister, Esther Trimble,

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married to the town druggist. Rumor had it that he was drinking himself to death somewhere.

After several years George Crowder reappeared in town, built himself a shack up in the woods, and lived there with only a setter dog for company. He seemed unwilling to renew old friendships. There was only one person who came and went freely—Joey Trimble, Crowder's twelve-year-old nephew.

To Joey Uncle George was a hero, the wisest man on earth, a man who knew the woods like no one else, who could read a whole story in a broken twig, a scuffled pile of leaves, a muddied stretch of stream, and who was certainly the best man in the world with a gun. And there was Uncle George's setter, Timmy, the best bird dog in the county, maybe in the state, maybe in all fifty states. Uncle George talked to Joey as though the boy was an equal, a grown man. Joey would have walked through hellfire for Uncle George.

In the fall and early winter Joey's visits to the shack in the woods were curtailed. There was school and homework. But on Fridays, after school, Joey did his homework as soon as he got home and then, sometimes after early dark, he took off for Uncle George's and was allowed to stay late. Eventually, when Joey's eyelids grew heavy in spite of himself, Uncle George drove him home in the jeep.

On this Friday evening Uncle George had two large venison steaks ready to broil over the hearth coals. It was a little after seven, already dark, when Timmy, the setter, raised his head and his tail thumped on the hearth rug. Uncle George knew that Joey was coming up the old logging road from the main highway. He and Timmy went out onto the shack's porch and the man lit the approach with his powerful flashlight.

Joey was running, stumbling, up the logging road as if the devil was after him. Uncle George realized that something must be wrong. He and Timmy went to greet the boy.

Joey literally fell, fighting for breath, into Uncle George's arms.

"There's a man lying 'longside the highway, Uncle George—bad hurt," the boy gasped. "Blood all over. It might be a hit-and-run."

"Anyone you know, lad?"

Joey shook his head. "No, sir."

"So let's move," Uncle George said.

The man went inside the cabin for his corduroy car coat and corduroy hat, then he,

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Joey, and the dog climbed into the jeep and went hurtling down the logging road. They said in town that Uncle George could handle that jeep like a race driver covering the dangerous Baja. How the boy and the dog stayed in it was a small miracle.

The man lying beside the highway was a ghastly sight. Uncle George had stopped the jeep so that its headlights were focused on him. Joey hung back, his face white, as Uncle George knelt beside the blood-stained body.

"Looks like a pig-sticking," Uncle George said.

The injured man lay on his back, his open eyes staring up at the starlit sky. With each anguished beat of his heart, blood pumped out of his mouth. His body looked crushed, almost flattened from back to front.

"Get over to the Andersons', Joey, and call the State Police," Uncle George said. "Tell 'em we need an ambulance in a hell of a hurry." The boy started off. "Take Timmy with you!"

The injured man struggled to say something and more blood came out of his mouth.

"Easy," Uncle George said gently. "We're getting help."

"Got to find George Crowder," the injured man said. It was a bubbling sound.

Uncle George's pale blue eyes were bright and hard. "I'm George Crowder," he said.

The man seemed not to have heard him. "Got to find George Crowder," he said, strangling on his own blood. "They—they'll kill the lady—"

"What lady?" Uncle George asked. If the man was ever going to talk it would have to be now. It seemed cruel to press him, but he was almost certainly not going to make it to the hospital.

"They'll kill the lady," the man said. A great sob shook his mangled body. "Got—to—find—George—Crowder. . ."

They were the last words the man ever spoke. The head turned to one side and the ditch was bloodied.

Tiremarks on the highway told a grim story. Uncle George, Sergeant Stanyer of the State Police, and Red Egan, Lakeview's Sheriff and an old friend of Uncle George's, studied them in the headlights from several cars and the searchlight on the State Trooper's car.

"Crazy man," Red Egan said. "Looks like he was hit—a skidding stop—backup at full power—then ran over him again. Three times in all." The tiremarks showed clear on the black licorice surface of the road.

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"It's unbelievable he lived long enough to speak," Sergeant Stanyer said. "He was looking for you, George?"

"So he said," Uncle George said. "That—and 'they'll kill the lady'."

"What lady?"

"Didn't say." Uncle George's face was like a marble mask. "I don't think he heard me. He didn't know he'd found me."

"You know any lady around here who's likely to be killed?"

"Know one or two who may rate it," Uncle George said. "But not the way this man meant it, I think."

"Not a shred of identification," Stanyer said. "No wallet. Cheap suit could have been bought at a thousand places—and long ago. Can't get any conclusive tiremarks off this blacktop. Doctor may be able to add something."

Uncle George drove a reluctant Joey home, then joined Stanyer and Red Egan at the police barracks. Under bright fluorescent lights Uncle George looked down at the body of the man who'd been trying to find him. Blood had been washed away from the unshaved face. Uncle George stared at it for a long time.

"You ever seen him before, Red?" he asked the Sheriff.

"No." Quite positive.

"Something itches me," Uncle George said. "I'd say 'no' like you, Red, but something bothers me. I'd swear I'd never seen this man—and yet—"

"You're not sure?" Sergeant Stanyer asked.

"Maybe—a long time ago," Uncle George said. "Twenty or thirty years ago—a young man who might have turned out to look like this. But I can't place him."

"I go back as far as you do, George," Red Egan said. "He's not from around here, young or old."

"I could be wrong," Uncle George said.

"Not your habit," Red Egan said. "Maybe it'll come back to you."

"Maybe."

"On the table is everything he was carrying," Stanyer said. "Two one-dollar bills and sixty-four cents in change. Cigarettes and a packet of matches."

Uncle George picked up the matchbook. Matchbooks are used for advertising, sometimes by local bars, restaurants, and shops. This one carried a national ad for an underarm deodorant. No indication of where it came from.

"The driver could have been some drunk—or some guy on drugs," Stanyer said. "He hit the guy by accident, saw he wasn't dead, was afraid he

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might be identified, so he backed up and ran over him a couple more times to make sure."

Uncle George was fiddling with the matchbook. "He was looking for me to tell me 'they'll kill the lady'," he said. "I'd say it looks more as if they were trying to stop him from doing just that—telling me." He opened the matchbook and his eyes narrowed. "You miss this?" he asked Stanyer, and handed him the matches. "Telephone number written inside it."

"Local," Stanyer said.

A few minutes later Stanyer had the information. The number belonged to a Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Clement of Lakeview.

"Big place over on South Mountain. You know it, George. The Clements are in Europe and their phone is temporarily disconnected."

"So our dead friend couldn't reach them if he tried," Uncle George said. "Who, I wonder, put him on to me?" He glanced at Stanyer. "I don't think I can buy your drunken hit-and-run driver who panicked, Sergeant. This man was on his way to find me. Someone must have given him directions, because he was only a few yards from the logging road that would have taken him straight to my place. That means he talked to somebody local. Could be a start."

"You were supposed to help him stop a killing," Red Egan said. " 'They'll kill the lady.' Why, since you don't know him, George, would he be looking to you for help and not me or the State Troopers?"

"You got a reputation, Mr. Crowder," Stanyer said.

"I had a reputation a long time ago," Uncle George said. His mouth tightened. "I wish I knew what bugs me about that face."

"Maybe this guy knew you knew this 'lady'," Stanyer said. "Looking for you because he knew you were her friend."

Uncle George shook his head.

"More likely he'd heard you'd help anybody in trouble," Red Egan said.

"Some stronger tie-in than that in his mind, I think," Uncle George said. "Some connection I can't make—not yet."

"Meanwhile there can be a lady in big trouble," Red Egan said.

One of the worst things about growing older, Uncle George thought, was that your memory begins to play tricks on you. In particular you begin to forget names. He had

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comforted himself by the thought that his memory bank got so full that it discarded the unimportant. The dead man's face had been ejected from his memory because it no longer mattered. Now it mattered, but he couldn't bring the face into focus.

He was up at daylight and back at the scene of the accident—rather, the murder, because that was what it must have been. What a brutal business! The man had been walking hurriedly along the road, having got directions from someone. Just a few yards from the logging road a car had come up behind him. He must not have expected danger from it. The car ran him down, stopped, backed up, ran forward in another crushing assault, backed again, then ran over him a final time and took off into the night. Deliberate, cold-blooded murder.

All this to stop the man from finding George Crowder and telling him about a lady who was going to be killed. The lady couldn't be far away. She had to be in Lakeview or nearby. George Crowder couldn't have been expected to give emergency help to someone far away. If the lady was here in Lakeview, and still unharmed, then the man or men who had driven the murder car must also still be near.

Uncle George raised his head as if he could sense them or smell them on the morning air. In the woods you listened and listened and finally you heard something. Out here on the highway the sounds were mechanical, the air polluted by carbon monoxide.

The Andersons lived about a hundred yards from the murder scene. It was to their house Joey had run to get help the night before. Uncle George stopped there and got his first bit of concrete information. Yes, a stranger had knocked on their back door a little after dark, asking for the way to George Crowder's shack. They'd told him the logging road was "just a piece further." Nothing odd about the stranger, except that he was walking. In the country everybody rides in some kind of vehicle.

Uncle George told them what had happened to the man. They were shocked.

"We did hear some tires squealin' right after he left," Fred Anderson said. "But there's a corner just beyond here, George, and tires squealin' ain't unusual. Kids all drive like hell these days."

"Someone from hell was driving that car," Uncle George said.

Joey, Uncle George knew,

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would be bursting with curiosity about the night before. Also, there would be a pot of fresh coffee on his sister Esther's stove. He drove the jeep to the Trimble house with Timmy, the setter, sitting upright like a human passenger on the seat beside him. The boy came running across the lawn before he and Timmy could climb out of the jeep.

"Not one word until your mom has poured me a cup of coffee," Uncle George said.

When Esther had provided him with coffee and a piece of homemade cake Uncle George gave a detailed account of everything that had happened to date.

"It's not a nice thing to ask," he said to his sister, "but I wonder if you'd mind coming down to the undertaker's and taking a look at the dead man?"

"George!"

"Might be someone we grew up with, Esther. So help me, I can't place him, but I've got the nagging feeling that—"

"Uncle George!" Joey had something to say he couldn't hold in any more. "About the Clements' place. They may be in Europe, but there's someone staying in the house. A lady."

Uncle George turned his head. "Say that again, lad."

"There's a lady staying in the Clements' house. Eddie Hanson's trying to sell magazine subscriptions. He gets some kind of special school prize if he sells the most. I biked around with him for a while day before yesterday. We were riding by the Clements' place, not planning to stop because Eddie knew they were in Europe. But we saw smoke coming out of the fireplace chimney, so we thought maybe they were back. We rode up to the front door and rang the bell and this lady answered and—"

"What lady, Joey?"

"Search me. I never saw her before, Uncle George. She was real nice, but she didn't want any magazines."

"Did she explain what she was doing there?"

"Just said she was staying in the house while the owners were abroad."

"The Clements probably wanted someone in the house," Esther said.

"They've got a caretaker," Joey said. "Old Mr. Bohrer."

"He doesn't live in," Esther said. She looked at Uncle George. "You think she might be the 'lady they'll kill'?"

"No reason to think so," Uncle George said. "But tell me what she looked like, Joey."

"Well, she's older than Mom. Maybe as old as you, Uncle George."

Esther laughed. "An old lady

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of fifty-two or -three."

"Did she tell you her name, Joey?"

"No, sir. And we had no reason to ask."

"Well, there's no use stewing over it, George," Esther said. "Mike Bohrer can tell you who she is and what she's doing there."

"I think I'll find out," Uncle George said.

Joey was added to the jeep's passenger list. They found old Mike Bohrer sitting on the post-office steps waiting for the mail to be sorted. In his salad days old Mike had been one of the best logging men in the state. He'd worked for the Lakeview Lumber Company most of his life, but arthritis and the years had slowed him down. He now mowed lawns, worked in gardens, and did odd jobs.

Mike was glad to see Uncle George. They called each other a few affectionate names and chatted a little about this and that, mostly about how much Mike envied Uncle George that setter dog, "settin' up in the jeep seat like a human bein'."

"I hear you got someone staying at the Clements' house," Uncle George said.

"Yep," Mike said, not very interested. "Friend of the folks, I guess."

"You guess?"

"Well, would she be stayin' there if she wasn't a friend? A Mrs. Chandler. Nice enough woman."

"The Clements invited her to stay in the house while they were gone?"

"Well, I suppose they did. Anyway, I had my instructions from Steve Randall. He's Josh Clement's lawyer, you know."

"Steve told you this Mrs. Chandler was going to stay in the house?"

"What's eatin' you?" Mike asked. "Never knowed you to be so nosey. You want all the i's dotted and the t's crossed? Steve didn't tell me anything. He wrote me a letter from Washington where he was—told me the Clements wanted me to open up the house for this Mrs. Chandler." He winked at Uncle George. "You got an eye out for her? She's kinda cute."

Joey snorted. Mrs. Chandler was an old lady of 52 or 53.

"It looks like a dead end, Joey," Uncle George said, as they took off for the Randall place at the far end of town.

You couldn't equate violence with Steven Randall. He was one of Uncle George's oldest friends. They'd graduated from law school together. Everyone thought George Crowder was the one who was going to make it big, but things

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had happened to him. Now Steve Randall was the town's celebrity. If you could believe the Gallup poll he was going to be the next Senator from the state and people said that in another six years he could well be living in the White House.

Uncle George hadn't seen much of his old friend in the last few years. Randall was a national figure, traveling around the country, preparing for the big pitch that lay ahead. Uncle George had become, at least, a part-time recluse. He couldn't recall how long ago it was he'd gone up to the big house on the hill where Steve Randall lived when he was home.

One reason for the fading of the friendship was Amy Randall, Steve's wife. Steve had married money and social position, some thought for what it would do for his political ambitions. Amy was what Uncle George called "image conscious." When Uncle George got into his trouble, way back, Amy had made it quite clear she considered his friendship with Steve Randall could only be harmful. Steve tried to explain, tried to see his friend on the side, but it was too difficult, too complicated. So they had drifted apart. And people said the Randalls' marriage had done some drifting, too. As he drove up the hill to the big house, Uncle George wondered what kind of reception he would get.

He left Joey and the setter in the jeep and approached the front door of the old Colonial house. He was reaching for the wrought-iron knocker when the door opened and he found himself faced by a young man in a natty sports jacket. He had dark hair and rather hostile dark eyes.

"Can I help you?" the man asked.

"I'd like to see Mr. Randall," Uncle George said.

"I'm afraid it isn't possible," the man said. "I'm Avery Tyler, Mr. Randall's executive secretary. If you'll tell me your business?"

"I'm an old friend, George Crowder. Just wanted a word or two with Mr. Randall."

There was flat refusal in Tyler's eyes, but a strong voice called out from behind him. "Who is it, Avery?"

"Steve!" Uncle George shouted. "It's George Crowder."

"George!"

Avery Tyler was swept away and a big handsome man with blond hair and a happy, smiling face took Uncle George in a bearhug of greeting. His eyes were a candid blue and bright with pleasure.

"You old sonofagun!" Steve

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Randall said. "Where the hell have you been keeping yourself?" He turned to his secretary. "Best damned lawyer you'll ever encounter, Avery. Best damned friend, too." He looked out at the jeep. "That Esther's boy?"

"Growing like a weed," Uncle George said. "Look, friend, I gather you're busy. I've got what may not be a problem at all and you might help me forget it."

"Well, come in, man!"

"I'm a little pressured for time, Steve." In a few terse sentences he told Randall about the murder victim of the night before and the victim's disjointed words before he died. "We found a matchbook on him and written inside the cover was Josh Clement's phone number. That phone's disconnected, but Joey happened to know that your Mrs. Chandler is staying at the house."

Randall's face clouded. "*My* Mrs. Chandler? Who the hell is Mrs. Chandler?"

"Mrs. Chandler is the woman you wrote Mike Bohrer about, telling him she was to be allowed to use the house."

"You've got something by the wrong end, George. I never wrote to Mike Bohrer about a Mrs. Chandler or anything else. Somebody's putting something over on somebody. We better see what's going on up there."

"I could do that for you, Mr. Randall," Tyler said. "You've got that speech to finish writing."

"To hell with the speech," Randall said. "I'll do better talking off the top of my head anyway. You've seen this woman, George?"

"No, but Joey did, trying to sell her magazines." Uncle George's mouth twitched. "She's an old lady of fifty-two or -three."

"If she says I wrote a letter for her to Mike Bohrer she's an old liar of fifty-two or -three. Let's go find out what she's up to. Get my car, will you, Avery?"

The lines in Uncle George's face seemed to be more deeply etched than normal. "If you have time we might stop at the mortuary on the way, Steve. I'd like you to look at the dead man. I have the feeling I've seen him before but I can't pinpoint him."

"Sure. It's on the way."

Tyler drove a fire-engine-red Mercedes up to the front door.

"We'll tag along behind you, Steve," Uncle George said.

Tyler still sat behind the wheel of the car.

"I won't need you, Avery," Randall said. "We've got that phone call coming from

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Washington. Tell 'em I'll be back in an hour or so."

They drove into town and stopped at the undertaker's. Inside they were shown the body of the murdered man. Randall, scowling, stared down at it for a long time.

"This man's name is Fred Wicks, George. You've seen him before—three or four times, I'd guess. It was a long time ago. He used to run a little lunch counter in New Haven when we were in law school. I remember a few times when we'd been studying late we went around the corner to his place for a sandwich and a glass of milk. He was just a kid then."

Thirty-odd years ago! The face of a scrawny kid swam into Uncle George's memory, a kid with a fresh mouth presiding over greasy hamburgers.

"I have reason to remember him better than you, George," Randall said. "We both enlisted in the navy the day after Pearl Harbor, took our training together, served on the same destroyer for a while. We got separated halfway through the war and I don't think I ever saw him again."

"Why would he be looking for me to help him instead of you?" Uncle George asked.

"If he knew you lived in this town he'd remember you were a lawyer."

"Maybe we can figure it out later," Uncle George said. "Right now I find myself concerned about your Mrs. Chandler."

"Not my Mrs. Chandler!" Randall said.

It was about a ten-minute drive to the Clement's place. Randall drove the red Mercedes right up to the front door. Uncle George parked the jeep a little distance away and told Joey and the setter to stay put. He felt a curious tension. He stopped and turned back to the boy.

"You see or hear anyone coming, Joey, blow the horn."

"Yes, sir."

"Especially anyone coming out of the woods."

"Yes, sir."

"And after you blow the horn you and Timmy duck out of sight. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Uncle George turned and headed for the house. He was about 15 yards from where Randall was waiting when the front door opened and a woman appeared. Some old woman of fifty-two or -three! She had the lush figure of a thirty-year-old woman in her prime. Her hair was red, probably not natural, but beautifully groomed. She had wide brown eyes and a generous mouth, and when she saw

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Randall her whole face seemed to light up like a kid's at Christmas.

"Steve!" she said. "I was beginning to think you were never coming."

Randall looked stunned. Then, in a broken voice, he said, "Maggie! Dear Maggie! What in God's name are you doing here?" She might not be his Mrs. Chandler, but he took her in his arms and held her very close.

Uncle George turned to go away. Whatever the problem was, Steve Randall could handle it now. Uncle George felt he was intruding on some kind of special privacy, yet instinct told him that there was danger somewhere around him, somewhere nearby. He was reluctant to stay, even more reluctant to go.

"George!" Randall's voice was sharp. "Please, George, don't leave."

Uncle George turned back. Steve Randall, his arm still around the smiling woman, offered an explanation. "I wasn't lying to you, George. I don't know why Maggie is calling herself Mrs. Chandler."

"Because I am Mrs. Chandler," the woman said, in a pleasant, husky voice.

"You're married, Maggie?"

"You didn't keep track of me, Steve," the woman said. "I was married. To a nice guy, a commercial airline pilot who made the mistake of piloting his ship into the side of a mountain. But what is the problem, Steve? I was about to call you in spite of the instructions in your letter. I thought something must have gone wrong, so I—"

"What do you mean, my letter, Maggie? I never wrote you any letter."

Randall and the woman stared at each other.

"I think it might be advisable to go inside," Uncle George said. He felt the small hairs prickling on the back of his neck.

They went into the house, into the pine-paneled living room.

"Do you still have the letter you say I wrote you, Maggie?" Randall asked. He was all business now.

"Of course I have it," Maggie Chandler said. She went over to a leather shoulder bag that was resting on the desk. She took a letter out of the bag and handed it to Randall.

Randall frowned at it. "My stationery," he said. "Postmarked Washington, D.C.—one week ago." He opened the envelope. "My letterhead." He read quickly, his frown deepening. Finally he looked up at the woman. "I never wrote this,

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Maggie." He held the letter out to Uncle George.

"You sure you want me to read it, Steve?" Uncle George asked.

"Of course I want you to read it, because the damned thing is a fake, a phony."

Uncle George read the typed letter: "My very dear Maggie:—I am in deep trouble and you may be the only person who can help me out of it. I know when I ask for help that I can count on you. I enclose five one-hundred-dollar bills to cover your traveling expenses. You will please come to Lakeview and take a taxi to the home of Joshua Clement. The Clements are away, but I've arranged for their caretaker to open the house for you.

"I may not get to you right away, Maggie. Don't call me. Just wait for me to show up. I wouldn't ask this if my whole future wasn't at stake. Please don't let me down. My very best love to you, Maggie. Steve."

Uncle George glanced at the envelope. It was addressed to Mrs. Joseph Chandler, Miami Beach, Florida.

"I didn't know Maggie had married," Randall said. "How could I know her married name or where she was living?"

"If this is a phony," Uncle George said, "then you can count on it that the letter to Mike Bohrer was sent by the same person—on your stationery, Steve."

"I've always followed your career, Steve," Maggie said. "I supposed the trouble you mentioned had to do with—well, with long ago."

"I did not write the letter!" Randall said. "I am not in any trouble!"

"I have the feeling you're in very big trouble, Steve," Uncle George said. "What did happen long ago? What did Fred Wicks have to do with it?"

"Freddie Wicks?" Maggie said. "What about him?"

"He was murdered here in Lakeview last night," Uncle George said. "You people want to talk to me? If not, you'd better handle it yourselves."

They wanted to talk, and it was a strange story. Maggie Chandler told her part of it, looking steadily at Uncle George. Thirty years ago she had been working in a bordello in Panama City. The customers had been almost entirely navy personnel—young men far away from home, lonely, often a little frightened. Taking care of their loneliness had seemed almost a patriotic duty.

"I was one of those boys," Steve said in a hard, flat voice. "Could you believe I fell in love with Maggie?"

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"Easily," Uncle George said.

Randall's ship was stationed at Panama City for several months. Fred Wicks was in that crew and he also patronized the bordello. One night there was a riot. A drunken sailor started to take the place apart. In the melee that followed, the sailor was knifed, killed. Military police came charging in.

"Maggie got us out of there, Fred Wicks and me," Randall said. "Down a back alley to another part of town—to her own apartment. It saved us from a court-martial, possibly a murder charge."

Maggie had never gone back to the bordello. She was in love, too. She and Randall lived together until his ship moved on. They had written to each other for a while, but the war had gone on for another four years and their love affair had died. They had seen each other once more, about a year after peace, and had mutually agreed there was no way to put it together again.

"I was still in love," Maggie said quietly. "But I knew I could never fit into Steve's lifestyle."

That was it. That was all of it, they told Uncle George.

"How much could this story hurt your political career, Steve?" Uncle George asked.

"Not much—not at all, I think. There was no crime that really involved me. I was a kid of twenty-one serving my country. My affair with Maggie?" Randall shrugged. "Thousands of boys had less than permanent relationships in those days."

"But if it was made to look as though there was something more? If now there was a crime?"

"I don't follow you, George."

"If you brought the lady here, hid her away from your wife Amy, and then—"

"Then what?"

" 'They'll kill the lady,' Wicks said. Having got what she believed was a genuine letter from you, Steve, Mrs. Chandler comes here. She follows instructions and just waits. But sooner or later, when you didn't get in touch, she'd have called you. You'd have come running and killed the lady to protect yourself from scandal."

"You're crazy!" Randall said.

"You misunderstand. It would *look* as though you'd killed the lady. She would be dead, shot with your gun. There'd be the letter."

"*My* gun?"

"The person who could steal your stationery could easily steal a gun from you. You used to collect guns when I first

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knew you, Steve. So they'd have you cold. You could deny till you were blue in the face that you didn't write to Maggie or to Mike Bohrer. When the Panama City story came out no one in the world would believe you. You'd lured Mrs. Chandler here to kill her, to keep her quiet."

"But who knew the Panama story?" Randall asked.

"Fred Wicks, of course. Knew it all from top to bottom. Found someone who would pay him handsomely for it. We have a new look at political methods these days. Your enemies were willing to buy what Wicks had to sell, but they must have agreed with you, Steve, that the story itself wouldn't do you much harm. But if they could build on it—?"

"But why kill Fred Wicks?"

"It's a guess," Uncle George said. "He was willing enough to sell you out, Steve, but when he discovered the plan involved murder—killing Maggie—he couldn't go along with it. He was afraid to see you, Steve, but he remembered me, your friend, a lawyer. He was on his way to tell me about it when they caught up with him and ran him down."

"And who are 'they,' George?"

Uncle George shrugged. "You know who your enemies are better than I do, Steve. They have to be here in the Lakeview area, of course. Country people don't lock their houses. It would be simple enough to steal some of your stationery and one of your guns."

"But can we prove anything against anyone?" Randall asked.

"If you've got the guts," Uncle George said. "They must still think they can pull it off."

"We've got the guts," Maggie said.

She was quite a woman, Uncle George thought. "They can't stall any longer if they're going to make their plan work," he said. "They know you've headed here with me. There's just a chance we won't have figured it out. So when I leave they close in on you two. I actually become a witness for them. You were here, you probably told me the Panama City story. I'd have to testify to both those facts. Then after I've left, you kill Maggie. There'll be somebody nearby who hears the shots and before you can do anything they've got you. Cold."

"What do you want us to do, Mr. Crowder?" Maggie asked quietly.

"I leave," Uncle George said. "I set it up for them just the way they want it. You risk

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being alone for a little bit. Then I come back."

"You can't be sure you'll be back in time," Randall said.

"I can make an awfully good try," Uncle George said. "But as I said, it will take guts to risk it. There's nobody nearby right now. The boy's watching. He'd have signaled me if he'd seen anyone."

Randall put his arm around Maggie. "We'll risk it," he said.

Uncle George went out to the jeep and joined Joey and the dog. "I'm going to drive down to the first turn in the road, Joey, and then I'm heading off into the brush. You and Timmy will lie low there till I come back."

"What's up, Uncle George?"

"I hope I run into a killer."

They started down the driveway to the front gates. Just as they were about to head out onto the highway an old station wagon confronted them. It was Mike Bohrer. Uncle George flagged him down.

"You headed for the Clements'?" he asked.

"I check the place every day," old Mike said.

"Well, everything's all right up there," Uncle George said. "Steve Randall's visiting with Mrs. Chandler. I don't think you need to check today." The old man's presence might hold up the killer or head him off.

"If you say so, George," old Mike said. "Give me time to pour a couple of beers at the Falcon."

The Falcon was a roadside café about a mile away. Old Mike was a customer at most of the drinking spots around Lakeview. He turned the station wagon north on the highway. Uncle George headed south toward town.

"He was probably just as glad not to go up there," Joey said.

"Not too fond of work, I imagine," Uncle George said.

"It's not that, Uncle George. He and Mr. Randall don't get on at all. It was Mr. Randall got him fired from the lumber company before he had a pension coming. Some of the kids say Mr. Randall caught him stealing, let him off, but got him fired."

The jeep was suddenly in the ditch and Uncle George was climbing out. He reached in the back for the shotgun he always carried there.

"You just may have saved a life, Joey. Now, you're not to move unless you hear shooting. If you hear a gun you're to run like hell for help."

"But, Uncle George—"

"No time to explain, lad. Just do as you're told."

Uncle George could move through the woods with almost

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animal quiet. He came to the edge of the growth of trees bordering on the lawn that fronted the house. He saw what he expected to see. Old Mike Bohrer was approaching the house from the north boundary and he was carrying a rifle. He seemed to be heading toward the back door of the house.

Uncle George circled the other way, running low and fast. As he turned the corner of the house he saw old Mike with his hand on the back door. Uncle George raised the shotgun to his shoulder.

"You'd better hold it right where you are, Mike, and drop that rifle unless you want me to blow your head off where you stand," Uncle George called out.

Old Mike turned, his face working. He dropped the rifle on the grass.

"God almighty, George, you scared the hell out of me. I just came back to—"

"I know what you came back for, Mike. Now shut up, or at least keep your voice down." Uncle George moved forward and picked up the rifle. "Mighty expensive gun for you to own, Mike. Belongs to Mr. Randall, doesn't it?"

Old Mike looked as though his legs were going to give way under him.

"Let's see how she sounds," Uncle George said. He pointed the rifle skyward and fired it three times. The shots echoed and re-echoed down the valley. "Now, quick into the house, old man."

Uncle George went into the kitchen, hanging onto old Mike. He pushed open the swing door that led into the main part of the house. He saw Steve Randall and Maggie clinging to each other.

"Everything's okay," he said. "Quick, Maggie. I want you out here. And you, Steve, play it like a guilty man. Hurry, please, Maggie."

She came without question and the door closed.

"That miserable old hulk over there was meant to be the triggerman. But I think our Number One boy is running across the front lawn right now," Uncle George said. He opened the swing door just a crack.

At that moment Avery Tyler, in his smart sports jacket, came running in from the front door.

"Oh, my God, Mr. Randall, I heard shots!" he said.

Randall just stared at him.

"I was afraid you'd do something desperate. That's why I tried to keep it from you that she was here. I tried to buy her off but she wouldn't listen to me. Is she dead?"

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"You miserable worm," Randall said, in a toneless voice.

"A very good scene, but it might become a bit too corny if it's continued," Uncle George said, coming into the room and pushing old Mike ahead of him. "You've been waiting outside there quite a while—with your friend—for those shots to be fired, haven't you, Tyler? Unfortunately for you I fired those shots—into the air. If you were any kind of a countryman you'd have known those shots were fired outdoors and not in the house. Okay, Maggie, you can join the party."

She came in from the kitchen, cool, unruffled. Tyler looked about to collapse.

"I'm going to take these two in," Uncle George said. "Citizen's arrest. I hope, Steve, that Maggie can help you prepare yourself for the next shock."

"Shock?"

"Take a look out those French windows, Steve."

Randall went to the windows. A woman stood at the end of the garden, gripping the top of a white picket fence.

"My wife!" Randall said.

"Waiting out there for Tyler to tell her it's all worked out just the way the two of them planned it."

"Amy and Tyler?"

"When I saw her waiting out there, Steve, I had to conclude there was nothing political about this at all. Woman in her forties, eager for the attentions of a young stud like Tyler. When Fred Wicks came to Tyler with his story, thinking he could blackmail you, Steve, he showed them the way. Your wife had the money to pay Wicks handsomely. But there were too many people involved—Wicks, who got squeamish, and old Mike who held a grudge and wanted his pension money. Your wife could take care of him, too. Now, with the ship sinking, they'll talk their heads off and probably make Tyler the villain."

"So help me God, Mr. Crowder—" Tyler began.

"You're going to need His help, friend," Uncle George said grimly.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

The more short stories by Ruth Rendell we read, the more we like her work. It grows on you . . . This is a fascinating story, full of sensitive observation—and chilling to the marrow. It is a story of "tension, as of time stopped," and the memory of it will not, of its own volition, go away and hide. Nor will the disturbing undertones become silent, even though the almost-taboo theme is handled with fine delicacy . . .

THE FALLEN CURTAIN

by RUTH RENDELL

The incident happened in the spring after his sixth birthday. His mother always referred to it as "that dreadful evening," and always is no exaggeration. She talked about it a lot, especially when he did well at anything, which was often since he was good at school and at passing exams.

Showing her friends his swimming certificate or the prize he had won for being top at geography: "When I think we might have lost Richard that dreadful evening! You have to believe there's Someone watching over us, don't you?" Clasping him in her arms: "He might have been killed—or worse." (A remarkable statement, this one) "It doesn't bear thinking about."

Apparently, it did bear talking about. "If I'd told him once, I'd told him fifty times never to talk to strangers or get into cars. But boys will be boys, and he forgot all that when the time came. He was given sweets, of course, and *lured* into this car." Whispers at this point, meaningful glances in his direction. "Threats and suggestions—persuaded into goodness knows what—I'll never know how we got him back alive."

What Richard couldn't understand was how his mother knew so much about it. She

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hadn't been there. Only he and the Man had been there, and Richard himself couldn't remember a thing about it. A curtain had fallen over the bit of his memory that held the details of that dreadful evening. He remembered only what had come immediately before it and immediately after.

They were living then in the South London suburb of Upfield, in a little terraced house on Petunia Street, he and his mother and his father. His mother had been over 40 when Richard was born and he had no brothers or sisters. ("That's why we love you so much, Richard") He wasn't allowed to play in the street with the other kids. ("You want to keep yourself to yourself, dear") Round the corner in Lupin Street lived his Gran, his father's mother. Gran never came to their house, though he thought his father would have liked it if she had.

"I wish you'd have my mother to tea on Sunday," he once heard his father say.

"If that woman sets foot in this house, Stan, I go out of it."

So Gran never came to tea.

"I hope I know what's right, Stan, and I know better than to keep the boy away from his grandmother. You can have him round there once a week with you, so long as I don't have to come in contact with her."

That made three houses Richard was allowed into—his own, his Gran's, and the house next door on Petunia Street where the Wilsons lived with their Brenda and their John. Sometimes he played in their garden with John, though it wasn't much fun as Brenda, who was much older, nearly 16, was always bullying them and stopping them from getting dirty.

He and John were in the same class in school, but his mother wouldn't let him go to school alone with John, although it was only three blocks away. She was very careful and nervous about him, was his mother, waiting outside the gates before school ended to walk him home with his hand tightly clasped in hers.

But once a week he didn't go straight home. He looked forward to Wednesdays because Wednesday evening was the one he spent at Gran's, and because the time between his mother's leaving him and his arrival at Gran's house was the only time he was ever free and by himself.

This was the way it was. His mother would meet him from school and they'd walk down Plumtree Grove to where Petunia Street started. Lupin Street turned off the Grove a bit farther down, so his mother

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would see him cross the road, waving and smiling encouragingly, till he turned the corner into Lupin Street. Gran's house was about 100 yards down. That 100 yards was his free time, his alone time.

"Mind you run all the way," his mother always called after him.

But round the corner he always stopped running and began to dawdle—stopping to play with the cat that roamed about the bit of waste ground or climbing on the pile of bricks the builders never came to build into anything. Sometimes, if she wasn't bad with arthritis, Gran would be waiting for him at her gate, and he didn't mind having to forgo the cat and the climbing because it was so nice in Gran's house.

Gran had a big TV set—unusually big for those days—and he'd watch it, eating chocolate, until his father came from the factory in time for tea. Tea was lovely, and fish and chips that Gran didn't buy at the shop but cooked herself, and cream meringues and chocolate eclairs, and tinned peaches with evaporated milk, all of it washed down with fizzy lemonade. ("It's a disgrace the way your mother spoils that boy, Stan")

They were supposed to be home by seven, but every week when it got to seven, Gran would remember there was a cowboy film coming up on TV and there'd be cocoa and biscuits and potato crisps to go with it. They'd be lucky to be home in Petunia Street before nine.

"Don't blame me," said his mother, "if his school work suffers next day."

That dreadful evening his mother left him as usual at the corner and saw him cross the road. He could remember that, and remember too how he'd looked to see if Gran was at her gate. When he'd made sure she wasn't, he'd wandered on to the building site to cajole the cat out of the nest she'd made for herself in the rubble.

It was late March, a fine afternoon and still broad daylight at four. He was stroking the cat, thinking how thin and bony she was and how some of Gran's fish and chips would do her good, when—what? What next? At this point the curtain came down. Three hours later it lifted, and he was in Plumtree Grove, walking along quite calmly, ("Running in terror with that Man after him!") when whom should he meet but Mrs. Wilson's Brenda out for the evening with her boy friend.

Brenda had pointed at him, stared and shouted. She ran up

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to him and clutched him and squeezed him till he could hardly breathe. Was that what had frightened him into losing his memory? They said no. They said he'd been frightened before that ("Terrified out of his life!") and that Brenda's grabbing him and the dreadful shriek his mother gave when she saw him had nothing to do with the curtain coming down.

Petunia Street was full of police cars and there was a crowd outside their house. Brenda hustled him in, shouting, "I've found him, I've found him!"—and there was his father all white in the face, talking to the policeman, his mother half dead on the sofa being given brandy, and—wonder of wonders—his Gran there, too. That had been one of the strangest things of that whole strange evening, that his Gran had set foot in their house and his mother hadn't left it.

They all started asking him questions at once. Had he answered them? All that remained in his memory was his mother's scream. That endured, that shattering sound, and the great open mouth from which it issued as she leaped upon him. Somehow, although he couldn't have explained why, he connected that scream and her seizing him as if to swallow him with the descent of the curtain.

He was never allowed to be alone after that, not even to play with John in the Wilsons' garden, and he was never allowed to forget those events he couldn't remember. There was no question of going to Gran's even under supervision, for Gran's arthritis had got so bad they had put her in the old people's ward at Upfield Hospital. The Man was never found. A couple of years later a little girl from Plumtree Grove got taken away and murdered. They never found that Man either, but his mother was sure it was the same one.

"And it might have been our Richard. It doesn't bear thinking of, that Man roaming the streets like a wild beast."

"What did he do to me, mum?" asked Richard, trying.

"If you don't remember, so much the better. You want to forget all about it, put it right out of your life."

If only she'd let him. "What did he *do*, dad?"

"I don't know, Rich. None of us knows, me nor the police nor your mum, for all she says. Women like to set themselves up as knowing all about things, but it's my belief you never told her no more than you told me."

She took him to school and fetched him home until he was twelve. The other kids teased

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him mercilessly. He wasn't allowed to go to their houses or have any of them to his. ("You never know who they know or what sort of connections they've got") His mother only stopped going everywhere with him when he got taller than she was, and anyone could see he was too big for any Man to attack.

Growing up brought no elucidation of that dreadful evening but it did bring, with adolescence, the knowledge of what might have happened. And as he came to understand that it wasn't only threats and blows and stories of horror which the Man might have inflicted on him, he felt an alien in his own body or as if his body were covered with a slime which nothing could wash away. For there was no way of knowing how, there was nothing to do about it but wish his mother would leave the subject alone, and to avoid getting friendly with people, and to work hard at school.

He did very well there, for he was naturally intelligent and had no outside diversions. No one was surprised when he got to a good university, not Oxford or Cambridge but nearly as good ("Imagine, all that brainpower might have been wasted if that Man had had his way") where he began to read for a science degree. He was the first member of his family ever to go to college, and the only cloud in the sky was that his Gran, as his father pointed out, wasn't there to see and share his glory.

She had died in the hospital when he was 14 and she'd left her house to his parents. They'd sold it and theirs and bought a much bigger one with a proper garden and a garage in a suburb some five miles farther out from Upfield. The little bit of money Gran had saved she left to Richard, to come to him when he was 18. It was just enough to buy a second-hand car, and when he came down from university for the Easter holidays, he bought a two-year-old Ford, took his driving test, and passed it.

"That boy," said his mother, "passes every exam that comes his way. It's like as if he *couldn't* fail if he tried. He's got a guardian angel watching over him, has had ever since he was six." Her husband had admonished her for her too-excellent memory and now she referred only obliquely to that dreadful evening. "When you-know-what happened and he was spared."

She watched him drive expertly round the block, her only regret that he didn't have a nice girl beside him, a sensible,

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hard-working fiancée—not one of your tarty ones—and saving up for the deposit on a house and furniture. Richard had never had a girl. There was one at college he liked and who, he thought, might like him. But he didn't ask her out. He was never quite sure if he was fit for any girl to know, let alone to love.

The day after he'd passed his test he thought he'd drive over to Upfield and look up John Wilson. There was more in this, he confessed to himself, than a wish to revive an old friendship. John was the only friend he'd really ever had, but he'd always felt inferior to him, for John had been (and had had the chance to be) easy and sociable and had had a girl to go out with when he was only 14. He rather liked the idea of arriving outside the Wilson's house, fresh from his first two terms at the university and in his own car.

It was a Wednesday in early April, a fine, mild afternoon and still, of course, broad daylight at four. He chose a Wednesday because that was early closing day in Upfield and John wouldn't be in the hardware store where he'd worked ever since he left school three years before.

But as he approached Petunia Street up Plumtree Grove from the southerly direction, it struck him that he'd like to take a look at his Gran's old house and see if they'd ever built anything on that bit of waste ground. For years and years, half of his lifetime, those bricks had lain there, though the thin old cat had disappeared or died long before Richard's parents moved. And the bricks were still there, overgrown now by grass and nettles.

He drove into Lupin Street, moving slowly along the pavement edge until he was within sight of his Gran's house. There was enough of his mother in him to stop him from parking directly outside the house ("Keep yourself to yourself and don't pry into what doesn't concern you"), so he stopped the car some few yards this side of it.

It had been painted a bright pink, the window woodwork picked out in sky-blue. Richard thought he liked it better the way it used to be, cream plaster and brown wood, but he didn't move away. A strange feeling had come over him, stranger than any he could remember having experienced, which kept him where he was, staring at the wilderness of rubble and brick and weeds. Just nostalgia, he thought, just going back to those Wednesdays which had been the highspots of his weeks.

It was funny the way he

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kept looking in the rubble for the old cat to appear. If she were alive, she'd be as old as he by now and not many cats live that long. But he kept on looking just the same, and presently, as he was trying to pull himself out of this dreamy, dazed feeling and go off to John's, a living creature did appear behind the shrub-high weeds. A boy, about eight. Richard didn't intend to get out of the car. But he found himself out of it, locking the door and then strolling over onto the building site.

You couldn't really see much from a car, not details. That must have been why he'd got out, he thought, to examine more closely this scene of his childhood pleasures. It seemed very small, not the wild expanse of brick hills and grassy gullies he remembered, but a scrubby bit of land 20 feet wide and perhaps twice as long. Of course it had seemed so much bigger because he had been so much smaller—smaller even than this little boy who now sat on a brick mountain, eyeing him.

He didn't mean to speak to the boy, for Richard wasn't a child any more but a Man. And if there is an explicit rule that a child mustn't speak to strangers, there is an implicit, unstated one that a Man doesn't speak to children. If he had *meant* to speak, his words would have been very different, something about having played there himself once, or having lived nearby. The words he did use came to his lips as if they had been placed there by some external (or deeply internal) ruling authority.

"You're trespassing on private land. Did you know that?"

The boy began to ease himself down. "All the kids play here, mister."

"Maybe, but that's no excuse. Where do you live?"

*On Petunia Street, but I'm going to my Gran's. . .*No.

"Upfield High Road."

"I think you'd better get in my car," the Man said, "and I'll take you home."

Doubtfully the boy said, "There won't be no one there. My mum works late Wednesdays and I haven't got no dad. I'm to go straight home from school and have my tea and wait for when my mum comes at seven."

Straight to my Gran's and have my tea and. . .

"But you haven't gone straight home, have you? You've hung about trespassing on other people's property."

"You a cop, mister?"

"Yes," said the Man.

The boy got into the car quite willingly. "Are we going to the cop shop?"

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"We may go to the police station later. I want to have a talk to you first. We'll go—" Where should they go? South London has many open spaces, commons they're called—Wandsworth Common, Tooting Common, Streatham Common... What made him choose Drywood Common, so far away, a place he'd heard of but hadn't visited, so far as he knew, in his whole life? The Man had known, and he was the Man now, wasn't he?

"We'll go to Drywood and have a talk. There's some chocolate on the dashboard shelf. Have a piece if you like." He started the car and they drove off past Gran's old house. "Have it all," he said.

The boy ate it all. He introduced himself as Barry. He was eight and he had no father or brothers or sisters, just his mum who worked to keep them both. His mum had told him never to get into a stranger's car, but a cop was different, wasn't he?

"Quite different," said the Man. "Different altogether."

It wasn't easy finding Drywood Common because the signposting was bad around there. But the strange thing was that, once there, the whole layout of the common was remarkably familiar to him.

"We'll park," he said, "down by the pond."

He found the pond with ease, driving along the main road that bisected the common, then turning left onto a smaller lane. There were ducks on the pond. It was surrounded by trees, quite a wood of trees, but in the distance you could see houses and a row of shops. He parked the car by the water and switched off the engine.

Barry was very calm and trusting. He listened intelligently to the "policeman's" lecture on behaving himself and not trespassing, and he didn't fidget or seem bored when the Man stopped talking about that and began to talk about himself. The Man had had a lonely life, a bit like being in prison, and he'd never been allowed out alone. Even when he was in his own room doing his homework, he'd been watched ("Leave your door open, dear, we don't want any secrets in this house") and he hadn't had a single real friend. Would Barry be his friend, just for a few hours, just for this evening? Barry would.

"But you're grown up now," Barry said.

The Man nodded, but as if that didn't make much difference, and then he began to cry. He cried as grownups do, almost tearlessly but with shame and self-disgust.

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A small and rather dirty hand touched the Man's hand and held it. No one had ever held his hand like that before. Not possessively or commandingly ("Hold onto me tight, Richard, while we cross the road") but gently, sympathetically—lovingly? Their hands remained clasped, the small one covering the large, then the large one enclosing and gripping the small. A tension, as of time stopped, held the two people in the car quiet, motionless. Then the boy broke it, and time moved again.

"I'm getting hungry," the boy said.

"Are you? It's past your teatime. I'll tell you what, we could have some fish and chips. One of those shops over there is a fish and chip shop."

Barry started to get out of the car.

"No, not you," the Man said. "It's better if I go alone. You wait here. Okay?"

"Okay," Barry said.

He was gone only ten minutes—for he knew exactly and from a distance which one of the shops it was—and when he got back Barry was waiting for him. The fish and chips were good, almost as good as those Gran used to cook. By the time they had finished eating and had wiped their greasy fingers on his handkerchief, dusk had come. Lights were going up in those far-off shops and houses but here, down by the pond, the trees made it quite dark.

"What's the time?" said Barry.

"A quarter past six."

"I ought to be getting back."

"How about a game of hide and seek first? Your mum won't be home yet. I can get you back to Upfield in ten minutes."

"I don't know. . .Suppose she gets in early?"

"Please," the Man said. "Please, just for a little while. I used to play hide and seek down here when I was a kid."

"But you said you never played anywhere. You said—"

"Did I? Maybe I didn't. I'm a little confused."

Barry looked at him gravely. "I'll hide first," he said.

He watched Barry disappear among the trees. Grownups who play hide and seek don't keep to the rules; they don't bother with that counting-to-100 bit. But the Man did. He counted slowly and seriously, then he got out of the car and began walking round the pond.

It took him a long time to find Barry, who was more proficient at this game than he, a proficiency which showed when it was his turn to do the seeking. The darkness was

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deepening, and there was no one else on the common. He and the boy were quite alone.

Barry had gone to hide. In the car the Man sat counting—97, 98, 99, 100. When he stopped he was aware of the silence of the place, alleviated only by the faint, distant hum of traffic on the South Circular Road, just as the darkness was alleviated only by the red blush of the sky radiating the glow of London. Last time round it hadn't been this dark. The boy wasn't behind any of the trees or in the bushes by the waterside.

Where the hell had the stupid kid got to? Richard's anger was irrational, for he had suggested the game himself. Was he angry because the boy had proved better at it than he? Or was it something deeper and fiercer—rage at rejection by this puny and ignorant little savage?

"Where are you, Barry? Come on out. I've had about enough of this."

There was no answer. The wind rustled, and a tiny twig scuttered down out of a treetop to his feet. God, that little devil! What will I do if I can't find him?

When I do find him I'll—I'll kill him.

He shivered. The blood was throbbing in his head. He broke a stick off a bush and began thrashing about with it, infuriated, shouting into the dark silence. "Barry, Barry, come out! Come out at once, d'you hear me?" He doesn't want me, he doesn't care about me, no one will ever want me—

Then he heard a giggle from a treetop, and suddenly there was a crackling of twigs, a slithering sound. Not quite above him—over there. In the giggle, he thought, there was a note of jeering. But where, where? Down by the water's edge. The boy had been up in the tree that almost overhung the pond.

There was a thud as of small feet bouncing onto the ground, and again that maddening, gleeful giggle. For a moment the Man stood still. His hands clenched as around a frail neck, and he held them pressed together, as if crushing out life.

Run, Barry, run. . . *Run, Richard, to Plumtree Grove and Brenda, to home and mother who knows what dreadful evenings are.*

The Man thrust his way through the bushes, making for the pond. The boy would be away by now, but not far away. And the Man's legs were long enough to outrun the boy, his hands strong enough to insure there would be no future of doubt and fear and curtained memory . . .

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But the boy was nowhere, nowhere. And yet—what was that sound, as of stealthy, fearful feet creeping away? He wheeled round, and there was the boy coming toward him, walking a little timidly between the straight, gray tree trunks *toward* him. A thick constriction gripped his throat. There must have been something in his face, some threatening gravity made more intense by the half dark, that stopped the boy in his tracks.

Run, Barry, run, run . . .

They stared at each other for a moment, for a lifetime, for twelve long years. then the boy gave a merry laugh, fearless and innocent. He ran forward and flung himself into the Man's arms, and the Man, in a great release of pain and anguish, lifted the boy up, lifted him laughing into his own laughing face. They laughed with a kind of rapture at finding each other at last, and in the dark, under the whispering trees, each held the other in a close embrace.

"Come on," Richard said, "I'll take you home. I don't know what I was doing, bringing you here in the first place."

"To play hide and seek," said Barry. "We had a swell time."

They got back into the car. It was after seven when they reached Upfield High Road, but not much after.

"I don't reckon my mum's got in yet."

"I'll drop you here. I won't go up to your place. Barry?"

"What is it, mister?"

"Don't ever take a lift from a Man again, will you? Promise me?"

Barry nodded. "Okay."

"I once took a lift from a stranger, and for years I couldn't remember what had happened. It sort of came back to me tonight, meeting you. I remember it all now. He was all right, just a bit lonely like me. We had fish and chips on Drywood Common and played hide and seek like you and me, and he brought me back nearly to my house—the way I've brought you. But it wouldn't always be like that."

"How do you know?"

Richard looked at his strong young man's hands. "I just know," he said.

He drove away, turning once to see that the boy was safely in his house. Barry told his mother all about it, but she insisted it must have been a nasty experience and called the police. Since Barry didn't know the license number of the car and had no idea of the stranger's name, there was little the police could do. They never found the Man.

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a NEW crime story by

CAROL CAIL

The story of a skyjack, but only a small-scale takeover. Not of a transoceanic airliner, with hundreds of passengers to keep an eye on. Just a private plane and one hostage to watch. But there can be as much terror and danger in a one-to-one situation, especially if—but find out for yourself. . .

GETAWAY

by CAROL CAIL

You hardly ever hear of a woman escaping from prison. Am I right? All you women's libbers, tell me, is it because we aren't as smart or as brave or what? Well, I escaped from the Fayette County holdover. I'm not saying how. It might come in handy again someday.

I will say this much. It was at night, and I found a Goodwill drop box just around the corner with sacks sitting around outside the way the sign says people shouldn't leave them. So I got a change of clothes and headed for the airport.

Since I was busted, in more ways than one, I couldn't hire a cab, and it's dangerous hitching rides. So I walked the whole ten miles, stopping once to catch forty winks in a tobacco barn. That made it nine A.M. when I stood in the shade of the Air Taxi Service sign, casing the place.

I was going to hijack myself a plane. Not an airliner. That was too much work and the odds were rotten. I was going to kidnap a private plane. No security checks, no schedules, and just one hostage to watch—why would anybody want to do it any other way? Unless, of course, he wants to see the world, instead of just lose himself in New York City, the way I planned it.

I stood there trying to act as if I was waiting for somebody, which I was, come to think of

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it. I watched the few people going about their business, to be sure nobody's business was watching me. None of them looked like a cop. A big guy in an oil truck was driving around putting gas in planes. A whistling mechanic was operating on an antique inside a barn of a hangar. A couple of kids in T-shirts and jeans, male, I think, sat with their backs against the block building marked Office, drinking pop. Through the office window I could see a fat girl with a Mia Farrow haircut, absorbed in paperwork behind a desk.

I wiped the sweat off my forehead with my arm and wished I had a first-class ticket on the turboprop revving up beside the terminal on the other side of the field. Then I grinned and touched the pocket holding my ticket for however and wherever I wanted to travel—Deputy Lewitt's gun.

I passed up my first chance. It was a family of five, with two-thirds of the kids squalling, who stuffed themselves and a mixed set of luggage into a plane between me and the hangar.

As soon as they'd got airborne, a more likely possibility developed. A tall, dark, gorgeous man carrying a clipboard and a bunch of maps came out of the office with a girl. They walked by me to a single-engine model parked so close I didn't have to move to hear what they said.

Handsome said, "Great day for flying." He unlocked the door and leaned inside to stick the key in the ignition.

Meanwhile she was undoing the ropes anchoring it. She kidded, "I didn't scare you too much last time?"

He did something to a wing and liquid dribbled from it, then he strolled around wiggling different pieces of the plane. "Well, I showed up today to go on with your lessons, didn't I?"

A loudspeaker on the office roof crackled, "Phone call, Mr. Brook. John Brook, please."

Handsome said, "Be right back. Don't go without me."

She giggled, "Oh, no way."

As the office door slapped shut I moved.

She was short and skinny and had a lot of wispy blonde hair hanging around her shoulders. Her shorts outfit left plenty of bare skin showing, and it was tan as far as you could see. She was examining the plane as if she owned it. I hated her right off.

"You know how to fly this thing?" I asked in a sticky-sweet voice.

She smiled politely. "I've been up a few times."

I let her have a peek at the

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gun in my pocket. "Get in fast and get her out of here faster."

She blinked and said, "I beg your pardon?"

So I lost my temper, spun her around, wrestled her inside, and jumped on the seat beside her. She couldn't skip out the other side because there wasn't any door there. I held the gun in her direction below the dash and repeated about being in a hurry and how would she like two belly buttons.

She bleached a little and grabbed for the ignition. The engine growled, the propeller hesitated, then whirled. We eased out between the office and the hangar.

I had to yell over the motor. "Can't you go any faster?"

She shook her head and shouted back, "Not on the ground."

"You find us the nearest runway and get us off the ground!"

We taxied clear of the parked planes and onto a blacktop strip. Out the tail of my eye I saw the office door open.

"Come on, come on! Use the whip, honey," I yelled.

"I've got to go to the end of the runway and turn around to take off."

"To heck with that," I said, only my language was stronger. "This ain't no seven-forty-seven. You pour it to her and let's fly. Now." And I waved the gun to wake her up.

Static rasped above my left ear and a unisex voice radioed, "Ground Control to three-three-papa. You do not have clearance. State your destination."

Blondie reached for the microphone on the dash.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Leave the pipeline alone. If we aren't in the air in ten seconds I'm putting a bullet in one of your nonvital spots."

The engine got noisier. We bumped along in first with the blacktop slipping under us faster and faster.

The radio started again. "Ground Control to three-three-papa. Three-three-papa. You are not cleared to taxi. I am not receiving you. If you read, hold short of runway two-zero."

While the voice babbled on we quit bumping and the blacktop fell away. The plane leaned with my window low, like a speedboat with me the one getting wet. If I opened the door, I'd fall out on Handsome right below looking up under cupped hands. I buckled by seat belt.

"Stop with the circles," I ordered. "Head east."

The radio shut up. The airport disappeared behind us.

After the thrill of relief that I'd got away with it came the discovery that I didn't care

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much for flying. It must have showed, because Miss Smarty-Pants said, "Is this your first time up?"

She needed taking down a peg. I said, "There's only one thing you should know about me. Just keep in mind that I was in prison for killing a man."

Which was a lie. I *wanted* to kill him at the police station when he claimed the liquor store holdup was all my idea.

The plane bucked as if the speedboat had hit the wake of another boat. I swallowed, and the engine sounded louder.

"Say, how many lessons have you had, sister? Has Handsome let you go up by yourself much?"

She opened her mouth and shut it, snap, like it just hit her what I asked. The plane quit bouncing, but my stomach did a dive all on its own.

"You do know how to land this machine, don't you?"

"I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen," she accused.

Way below us our shadow slid smooth and safe along the ground.

"If I turn around and call the tower, they can talk us down on the parts I haven't practised yet."

"Some other tower can talk you down. Keep that pointer on east." I motioned at the compass. The rest of the dashboard was foreign language to me, except Heater and Fuel. The fuel gauge read one-quarter full.

"How far can we fly on that much gas?" I asked.

She flipped a switch marked L so it read R, and the gauge needle dropped down to empty. I yelled, "Hey!" and she threw the switch over to L again.

"It's okay. I was checking the right tank. There's one in each wing."

"So the right one's empty. What about the left?"

"We can go about an hour on it."

"How far?"

"Maybe a hundred miles."

I cussed a while and got it out of my system. When she could get a word in she asked, "Is there someplace in particular you want to go? We have to keep track of where we are so we can find an airport with a tower before we run out of fuel. There's a map on top of the panel in front of you."

I reached it for her, and she spread it over her steering wheel and studied it, staring out the side window every little bit. I stared too, but all there was to see was the ground, green and lumpy, with just a roof or a pond here and there, and a few twisty paths that were really roads or creeks. White puffs of clouds whizzed past us the op-

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posite way. The engine noise was giving me a headache.

She said, "I guess I'm lost already."

Well, I could believe that. There sure weren't any highway signs up here.

She fiddled with something and the radio began making weird beeping sounds. Then a bored voice reeled off jargon I couldn't make anything of, but Blondie adjusted a dial and seemed satisfied.

She said, "If I can get the right heading, I think we could make it as far as Huntington. Is that all right?"

Huntington was still this side of the mountains.

I was tired of swearing, so I jammed the gun into my right pocket, slouched farther in the seat—which hurt, because me and the plastic had sweated together—and said okay.

That was all that was said for a while. We kept going east. She couldn't pull anything funny with the compass because the sun would be in the wrong place. Once I asked her if she knew where we were, and she said she thought she did. She'd throw a switch here, turn a knob there now and then. It seemed as if she had some idea what she was doing. The gas-gauge needle kept sinking.

I closed my eyes to help my headache, and the next thing she was jiggling me awake. I jumped, clutched at my pocket, and felt the gun. The sun was in front of us and a hazy blue mountain range lay crossways in our path. I relaxed.

Until I eyed the gas-gauge needle. You couldn't have put a hair between it and the empty line.

"I was on the wrong heading. We're south of Huntington. We *must* land. The fuel is—"

"I know, I know!"

I looked out my window at mountains, trees, rocks, rivers, and not a bare flat patch in sight. We were in a trough between mountain ridges, so when the plane banked to miss a peak sticking up as high as us, a whole line of mountains spun past the windshield, with filmy clouds boiling between us and them.

It was worse than any carnival ride I ever wanted off of. She straightened the plane and we coasted between mountains. Everything was sharp angles and hard surfaces. Even Charles Lindbergh in the driver's seat wouldn't have cheered me.

I was glad about the loud engine when I shouted, "Any parachutes?" She couldn't hear my shaking.

"No." I bet her voice was doing some quivering, too. She had chewed all the lipstick off her bottom lip.

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We hit a cloud and the windows turned white. I'd been wrong to think I couldn't be more scared. We kept running blind like that, and it had me thinking crazy. Like, what if we came out of the cloud and the world had disappeared?

The cloud ended, and the ground was still there, only a lot closer. There were some roofs out my side, but I couldn't see any roads for the trees.

Blondie said, "I'm going to try for Omen."

"What?"

"An airstrip. Omen."

"Near here?" Hope trickled in.

"I think we're right over it."

I banged my forehead on the window, trying to see straight down. Hope trickled right out again. You've seen on TV commercials where the lady and an automobile are stranded high on a rocky outcropping completely surrounded by nothing? This could have been the same cliff or mesa except it had a grass path of a runway and a metal hut with a couple of planes parked by it.

I swallowed. "Okay. Call them on your radio and let's get this done with."

"There is no radio control here. I'm going to have to do it by myself." She was so scared, her face was ugly.

She said, "I can call Huntington and tell them to dispatch a fire truck or an ambulance."

"Forget it. I can't use the publicity if you land us right. If you land us wrong, what we'll need is a hearse."

She put us in a turn and held it. We circled lower and lower. I felt like bathwater going down a drain. The mountains kept rising and we were looking up instead of across at them. I lost the cliff we were supposed to light on; I thought it was behind us, but then Blondie pulled the throttle and the motor slowed, and out front a couple blocks away was that postage stamp of a landing pad.

Blondie cranked hard on a handle sticking out of the ceiling. She cut the throttle more. I had this mixed-up feeling of wanting to be a lot lower and wanting to be a lot higher. The wings were wobbling, and part of the time we were skidding sideways. We reached our end of the cliff, and we were like five stories up. We drifted to three and skimmed there, wasting runway.

"We're too high. I can't get it down!"

While she was screaming, Blondie shoved in the throttle, pulled back on the steering wheel, cranked the ceiling, and we climbed past the other end of the cliff. She banked us hard.

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There was nothing out my window but sky.

"Sister, if we run out of gas, you won't have to get us down."

"The runway's too short. I've got to touch down at the very beginning or I won't be able to brake before we're at the other end."

"Then do it."

"We have to land on this pass. There can't be fuel enough for another try."

"I said, do it!"

We rocked and rolled into position again. Blondie went through her shutting-down-the-power routine. We did our tipsy cruise past the lip of the drop-off. We were lined up with the runway and about two stories high this time. Blondie jerked the throttle full length. We dived toward the ground like a TV camera going from a long shot to a close-up.

The nose dipped and we dropped the last feet hard. The tires smashed the ground and bounced us up again. We fell and stayed, barreling along the rough field with our teeth and everything else rattling.

Blondie let go of the wheel and reached under the dash with both hands for the brake. She yanked it, and we slowed from maybe 70 to maybe 60. We had a quarter of the runway left.

"Jump!" she screamed. "*Jump!*"

I fumbled with the door lock, scrabbled it open, and nearly split myself trying to bail out with the seat belt still fastened. My fingers might as well have been toes undoing the blasted thing.

I threw myself out, ricocheting off the door jamb to the door and then to part of the wing before the ground itself broke my leg.

The gun in my pocket went off at the same time and took care of the other leg. I lay in the weeds with my eyes squeezed shut, swearing and hurting all over, and looking forward to the sound of that airplane crashing over the cliff with Blondie still inside yelling.

What I heard instead made me raise my head and stare at the end of the runway.

She had the engine on full blast again. The plane sailed out into space, dipped, caught itself, and started climbing slow and steady. I watched and waited for the cough and sputter of a dry tank.

She made a lazy turn. Minutes passed. The engine kept on purring. She made a complete circle without changing altitude, then she started on another lap.

I could just hear her on the line to Huntington, and it

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wasn't a fire truck she was ordering. For the first time since I was 16 I felt like crying. She kept circling, like a vulture keeping track of the prey.

Maybe fifteen minutes went by, then she aimed at the far end of the field. I didn't need to watch her landing. I knew it would be a beauty. When she passed me, both wheels were plastered to the ground, and she was practically Sunday driving with one arm out the window.

She made a U-turn, took it to the aluminum building, and killed it. Two guys in overalls came out of the building and helped her out of the plane. They stood yammering a while before the gray car with the light on top slithered into view. Then everybody headed my way, and about the only good thing I could think of was that she'd been impressed enough by me to wait for the cops before checking on whether I was alive or not.

We had to wait another ten minutes for an ambulance, and Blondie lounged beside me in the grass in a big show of no hard feelings. I had to break down and ask.

"How'd you fly without gas?"

"Next time you hijack a Tri-Pacer and you're checking out the fuel, be sure to check the reserve fuel tank. The gauge is in the back seat. It holds eight gallons or about one hour's worth."

"Back seat. Who'd think to look in such a crummy place? So I made a mistake."

"Two mistakes."

She smiled like a politician's wife and stood up as the ambulance roared onto the field.

"You were a female chauvinist pig," she said.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Next time you see two people, a man and a woman, about to begin a flying lesson, don't be so quick to assume it's the man who's the teacher."

"Q"

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QUEEN'S QUISINE

suggested by MICHAEL AVALLONE

Michael Avallone suggests below the names of ten eating places that cater especially to a mystery clientele — what might be called Cafés du Crime, Gumshoe Grills, Bloodhound Beaneries, Larcenous Lunchrooms, Detectives' Drive-Ins, and Private Eye Pizza Parlors. Why not choose your favorite mystery writers or characters and put them in the restaurant business? No prizes, but we'll be happy to publish the best names and give you credit in print.

S. S. VAN DINER
THE CREASEY SPOON
SLOPPY POE'S
HALLIDAY INN
MACDONALD'S
HOUSE OF CHAN
PERRY MAISONETTE
FISH HOUSE
MANNY WOLFE'S
FISCHERMAN'S WHARF

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a *NEW* story about

William Shakespeare, Detective

by J. F. PEIRCE

In which the Immortal Bard again plays the role of a Sixteenth Century "detector," one of the many roles of his salad days that prepared him for the many-faceted roles he created later. . .It is not surprising to be told that Shakespeare's experience in life exposed him to the entire Calendar of Crime, including, in this tale, highway robbery, extortion, double-cross, torture, impersonation, murder —deep-dyed villainies all, and all "cloathed" in the Elizabethan trappings of melodrama . . .

THE HIDEOUS HIGHWAYMAN;

or, The Wig of Blood

by J. F. PEIRCE

Montague House
London, England

Mr. Ellery Queen,
229 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10003

Dear Ellery:

Enclosed is the third case in which William Shakespeare played the real-life role of detective. It is based on new material I uncovered in the private papers of Justice Jennings of Shoreditch. These records show that Shakespeare's activities as a detective ranged well beyond the London area. No doubt you'll easily recognize which of his plays this case influenced.

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THE HIDEOUS HIGHWAYMAN;

or, The Wig of Blood

Justice Jennings removed his wig and placed it on the stand beside his desk, his complete baldness accentuating his bulldoglike appearance. Turning to the young actor-playwright, Will Shakespeare, he said: "A crime has been committed, Will. And though we know who *probably* did it, we don't know what was taken—or from whom." He nodded towards the toad-like man seated to his left. "I've been bragging on you to Justice Hollow. Now I must beg a favour."

"Your Honour knows I'm always at his service," the young man replied.

"Thank you, lad. At least, you'll be paid well for your trouble. Tell me, do you know the Inn of the Pied Bull near Bicester?"

"Aye. It's at a crossroads. I stopped there once for a pint of Malmsey, on my way to London."

"Were you robbed there?"

The playwright laughed. "I had naught of which to be robbed, Your Honour. Not even my innocence."

Justice Jennings leaned forward. "We've reason to believe that the inn is run by highwaymen, that when travellers lay over there, their luggage is searched and their destination determined. For the next day they are waylaid on the road and robbed of their valuables. Then, when they reach home, they receive word from the innkeeper that he has been apprised of their loss and that for a price he can secure the return of the stolen articles."

"Can he not be made to tell the source of his information?"

"That's the clever part," Justice Hollow interjected. His round face was split by a wide mouth and divided by a bottle nose set between protruding eyes. "There's no law against receiving stolen property, and the ransom requested is never more than half the worth of what was taken. So the victims are happy to pay to cut their losses."

"Can no one identify the highwaymen, Your Honour?"

"The problem is to get someone to testify against them," Justice Hollow said, sticking out his tongue as if to spear a fly. "Though they wear hideous masks to terrify their victims, from their size they are doubtless Smirk, the innkeeper; Burden, the husband of his eldest daughter, Gander; Wallcorn, the husband of

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his middle daughter, Region; and Francis, the lover of his youngest, Corriander.

"Smirk has divided the roads amongst them. He has the road to Birmingham, Burden the one to Bedford, Francis that to London, and Wallcorn the road to Oxford. Though a victim is robbed by but one man, when he learns there are three others to chop off his finger if he points it at one of them, prudence causes him to change his description. *Large* becomes *small* and *dark*, *fair*, for they are villainous-looking creatures."

The chambers of Justice Jennings were situated on the high street, and the playwright, glancing out the window, noted that the faces of passersby were caricatured by the imperfections of the glass. "What does Your Honour want of me?" he asked.

"Assistance in securing the return of something stolen from a personage close to the Crown."

"What was taken, Your Honour? And from whom?"

"We don't know," Justice Hollow replied. "I was summoned to the Court, along with Sheriff Consequence, in whose bailiwick the Pied Bull lies. We were told by Lord Burleigh that a nobleman, travelling on business for the Queen, was robbed near the inn of an object of inestimable value. We were ordered to secure its return or expect to take up residence in the Tower."

"When was it taken?"

"Within the past fortnight. I confess I'm frightened. I don't know what to do, even where to begin. Though I'd ask for no better man than the Sheriff in a fight, in an affair of this sort he's less qualified than I. In desperation I turned to my old friend Jennings, and *he* suggested that *you* might help me."

Justice Jennings growled unhappily. "I apologize for getting you into this, lad," he said.

"I'm flattered Your Honour thinks so highly of my ability," Shakespeare said, then turned to Justice Hollow. "Do you have any clew as to who the nobleman is, Your Honour?"

"Only conjectures, from things Lord Burleigh let slip. He was quite distraught. Perhaps he too fears the Tower." He paused and stuck out his tongue, as if to point up his next statement. "What I say now must not go beyond this room—for the safety of all of us. I inferred that the nobleman is one of the Queen's *favourites*—and no doubt young and handsome. Her Majesty's at a dangerous age."

Shakespeare smiled. "In affairs of the heart, Your Honour, all ages are dangerous."

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"Aye. I gathered that the nobleman is a Viscount and that he was on his way to London—from somewhere in the North, possibly Edinburgh. He lay overnight at the Pied Bull, and the next morning, as he rode towards London, he was ambushed and robbed. His description of the highwayman points to Francis."

"Bicester hardly seems on a direct route from Edinburgh to London, Your Honour."

"No. I hadn't thought of that."

"Did he have a bodyguard, or a pack horse?"

"No."

"I assume he was armed."

"Aye. But he was taken by surprise and forced to discard his weapons and the object he was carrying. Now Her Majesty has received the demand of a king's ransom for its return. And the Sheriff and I have been ordered to secure its return—without payment and without even knowing what it is. Well, what do you make of it?"

"A number of things, Your Honour. I find it strange that the highwaymen should suddenly demand 'a king's ransom,' when till now they have been quite reasonable in their demands. Obviously they know the value of what they have and feel that the Queen will pay to secure its return.

"That the Viscount was coming from Edinburgh suggests some State matter betwixt England and Scotland. Perhaps the Queen had sent him as a messenger to King James—regarding his mother's rumoured involvement in the Babington Plot to assassinate Her Majesty and liberate Mary."

Justice Hollow nodded. "I overheard several lords discussing the matter while I was at the Court. There seemed to be a strong sentiment to behead Mary but a desire to placate King James if they did, by guaranteeing his succession to the English throne, since Queen Elizabeth has no heir."

"What was stolen, then, could be the Queen's signet—which the Viscount carried as a sign of his good offices and his power to act for Her Majesty in any agreement he reached with King James."

"God's blood!" Justice Hollow exclaimed. "I trow you've hit the mark—or close to it. I see what you mean about this young man, Jennings. He gets to the heart of the matter—and quickly."

Justice Jennings beamed. "I told you he's a marvel."

"I can easily believe the Queen will agree to beheading Mary," Justice Hollow continued. "And if her signet is not returned, she

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will probably agree to beheading *me* as well. Beware the temper of a red-headed woman, even if her hair be but tinted or false. The Queen's hair is the colour of blood!"

"I trust Your Honour realizes this is but theory," Shakespeare protested. "What was taken might be something of value *only* to the Queen or something compromising to her."

Justice Hollow nodded.

"I would suggest that since you have the Queen's authority, you arrest Francis and torture the location of the object from him."

"But we don't have her authority," Justice Hollow said, sticking out his tongue. "And we have been warned by Burleigh to avoid *all* notoriety. We cannot move against even a suspected highwayman till we are sure of recovering the object. What if we arrested him and he is innocent or he confessed nothing under torture? We would have no choice but to kill him, and if the truth came out, we would pay for our mistake with our lives.

"And if this has to do with King James, as you suggest, you can see the delicacy of the matter. As for Her Majesty's signet, who can place a value on that?"

"Assuming it is her signet that was stolen," Justice Jennings said, "how would *you* proceed in this matter?"

Shakespeare reflected before answering. "As Your Honour knows," he said, "the playhouses have been closed for fear of The Plague. And they won't reopen till something other than rain washes the white crosses from the infected dwellings. I could form a troupe of strolling players to go to Bicester. And we could perform our turns in the Pied Bull's innyard. Will Kemp could sing and dance jigs to the pipe, and Dick Burbage and the others could perform scenes from plays. Thus, we would have ears everywhere.

"On second thought, it might be better if I go separately to Bicester, under a different guise. That way I might be lodged in another part of the inn and establish a different relationship with Smirk and the others."

"What guise would you assume?"

"That of a butcher in search of employment. I helped my father at that trade as a youth."

"Very well, but be careful. When will you leave?"

"In the morning, Your Honour. I'll have to select the players and brief them, then hire a carrier-cart and dray horses for them and a horse for myself. And you?"

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"I will leave presently, but first let me give you some money."

"And let *me* give you *this*," Justice Jennings said, taking a pistol from his desk. "May God go with you!"

When the playwright arrived at the Pied Bull after a hard journey, he discovered Justice Hollow and Sheriff Consequence examining a body in the innyard.

Once the ostler had taken his horse and the chamberlain his luggage, Shakespeare was told to examine the body himself, then pressed into service with the other guests and several locals to form a Coroner's Jury.

The dead man's face was a mask of pain or terror. Blood had dried on his hands and his face and hair. Apparently he had put his hands first on the wound in his chest, then covered his face with them.

Once the examination of the body was completed, Justice Hollow took the testimony of witnesses. Smirk was the first to testify. He was a big man with a barrel chest and a voice aged in ale. Though he had a halo of white hair, his appearance was anything but angelic. A three-inch scar showed through the stubble of beard on the right side of his face, and his mouth canted downward in a perpetual leer.

"What is your name?" the Justice asked.

"Julius Landstreicher, Your Honour, but men call me Smirk."

"And the name of the dead man?"

"Francis, Your Honour."

"Was that his first or his last name?"

"His only name for ought I know, Your Honour. But obviously 'twill be his last."

"I thought he was engaged to your daughter."

"He were, Your Honour. But *she* were the one interested in his name, not me."

"How did he meet his death?"

"He did not meet it, Your Honour. It came to him. He was standin' where he lies, betwixt a man and his horse. 'Stand aside, varlet!' the man said, impatient-like. And when Francis didn't move. the man took out his dirk and stabbed him."

"Why didn't Francis move?"

"Because he were an arse of a different colour, Your Honour, one not about to take orders from no man. He were a deliberate type who did nothin' hasty. I could tell from the look of him he

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were weighin' all possibilities. Did he want to move? And if he did, did he want to move to the left or to the right? And since right were no better than left and left no wronger than right, he had Hobson's choice as 'twere."

"You're saying he deliberately antagonized the man?"

"No more than the man antagonized him, Your Honour."

"Where did the man go after he stabbed Francis?"

"He stepped over the body, mounted his horse, and rode off."

"Did you make no attempt to stop him?"

"No, Your Honour. I thought one dead man were enough."

One of the locals snickered, and Smirk looked at him and smiled, causing the man to become silent.

"Do you know the murderer's name?" Justice Hollow asked.

"No, Your Honour. He stopped off for a pint and that was all."

"What did he look like?"

"He were a big man, and he had a baldpate and a black beard shaped like a spade. And he were dressed all in black."

Justice Hollow turned and addressed the Jury. "Do any of you have any questions?" he asked.

"I do, Your Honour," the playwright said. "Why are the dead man's fingernails missing?"

Justice Hollow examined the victim's blood-stained fingers, then turned to Smirk for an answer.

"He shut a door on his hand."

"On both hands?" Shakespeare said in disbelief. "*All* his nails are missing."

"Well?" Justice Hollow demanded of Smirk.

The innkeeper stared at the playwright, and the man sitting next to Shakespeare shivered. "The young man is *too* observant, Your Honour," Smirk said. "The truth is that me daughter and Francis had a lover's quarrel, and to prove his love for her, he pulled out his nails."

Justice Hollow turned to the Jury without comment. "Are there any other questions?" he asked.

As there were none, he called the next witness. Once all the witnesses had been heard, each of whom carefully echoed Smirk's story, the Justice charged the Jury, which quietly returned a verdict of murder.

Justice Hollow thanked the members of the Jury, and once they were dismissed, Shakespeare asked the chamberlain the number of his room, so that Justice Hollow would know where to

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find him. A quarter of an hour later there was a discrete knock at his door.

"Well, what do you think?" Justice Hollow asked, once he had closed the door after him.

"That Smirk, Burden, and Wallcorn murdered Francis after first torturing him, Your Honour."

"Because his hands were covered with blood to conceal the fact that the nails were missing?"

"That and other things, Your Honour. I doubt that he was killed in the innyard. There's too little blood there. I suspect they killed him elsewhere, then moved his body once they concocted a story.

"I suggest you have a physician examine the body. The lips and mouth are swollen. My father was a Justice of the Peace when I was a boy, and I went with him once to investigate the death of a young lad who'd drunk a lye solution accidentally. His mother had been making soap and had left the lye where he could reach it. I'll never forget his face. He wore the same mask of agony as Francis. . . .No doubt you noticed the soap vat in the innyard."

Justice Hollow nodded.

"From the look of the body," the playwright continued, "Francis was starved as part of the torture. No doubt that was why he gulped the lye when it was offered to him, thinking it was water."

"But why would they torture and kill him?"

"Perhaps when he robbed the Viscount, he held out on them, Your Honour."

"But why? They've always appeared to be close-knit."

"Even close knitting can come unravelled, Your Honour. Besides, what was stolen was doubtless of such value that he could not resist the temptation. To a robber, one man's purse is probably as good as another's—except that the one may have more in it than t'other."

Justice Hollow stuck out his tongue, then quickly retracted it. "Do you think they tortured the location of the signet from him?" he asked.

"They might have, then killed him, since he wasn't to be trusted. Or he might have been killed accidentally or in a fit of rage when he refused to talk."

"Everything is so complicated. Whate'er can we do?"

"I've been thinking. When the actors arrive, I'll have one of

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them inform Smirk that I'm a suspected murderer and that he should keep an eye on me."

"But why? Haven't you drawn enough attention to yourself already?"

"Your Honour forgets that they're now short a man and will be looking for someone to replace him. And if they killed Francis, they may be looking for someone to distract Corriander. I saw her crying in the scullery, and I'm willing to sacrifice myself in a good cause."

Justice Hollow laughed. "I envy you your sacrifice. She's a lusty, full-figured animal—and as pretty a brunette as e'er I saw."

"But this was a honey blonde, Your Honour."

"Then it was Region. Gander's a brunette also. But why would Region be crying?"

"I don't know, Your Honour. There's one other thing I need to tell you, then I suggest you leave before we're discovered. My luggage has been searched—and by an expert. I placed a hair in the fastener. Now it's missing. But my clothing does not appear to have been disarranged."

"I see. I'll take my leave then. If you need to get in touch with me, notify the Sheriff in Bicester."

An hour later Shakespeare was on his way to the bar when the cart bearing the actors arrived. The ostler rushed to unharness the horses, and the playwright called to him: "I say, ostler, where's the privy?"

The stableman shouted out directions, then added: "Just take a deep breath and follow your nose! You can't miss it!"

And Dick Burbage can't miss that I want him to meet me there, Shakespeare thought.

"What kept you so long?" he demanded when the actor at last appeared. "I thought I'd swoon from the stink. You'd think Smirk would keep this place sweet-smelling with flowers."

"I was detained by the Sheriff. God's wound! This *is* a foul-smelling place! Why did you wish to meet me *here*, anyway?"

"To assure our priv-acy," the playwright said, smiling. "First, let me tell you what's happened, and then what I want you to do. . ."

That evening Shakespeare was eating dinner at the public table when Burbage entered. Seeing the playwright, he gave a start of recognition; then hurried into the bar.

Smirk served him, and when the actor said nothing, the

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innkeeper nodded in the playwright's direction. "You seemed to recognize yonder man," he said.

"Aye. I've seen him afore, in London."

"You seem not to care for him. Might I ask why?"

Burbage hesitated. "The man's a deep-dyed villain. He's said to be a murderer. If I were you, I'd keep a watch on him."

"Thankee kindly, friend. I will."

For his part, Shakespeare appeared oblivious of everything except his food. When he finished eating, he returned to his room. Almost immediately, there was a knock on his door, and when he opened it, Smirk pushed past him.

"I wondered how long it would take you to get here," the playwright said. "I saw I was recognized. And I assume you were warned against me."

Smirk raised his bushy eyebrows. "You're sharp," he said.

"In my trade one has to be if he wishes a long life and a merry one. Well, do I pack my things and move on?"

"Don't be hasty. I'm short a man—because of what happened. And if you're the man I think you are, we can do business."

"If we do, I trust you'll tell me what the poor devil did—why he was tortured. I wouldn't want to make the same mistake he did."

Smirk stared at the playwright through slitted eyelids. "Perhaps you're *too* sharp," he said.

"You wouldn't want a partner who wasn't, would you?"

"No-o-o," Smirk said, thoughtfully. "And since you've seen what happened to Francis, I wager you'll play it smart. Besides, you're sure of yourself. I like that." He hesitated, then continued: "As you've no doubt guessed, we're highwaymen. Do you ken the trade?"

"No, but I'm quick to learn."

"There *were* four of us. Each covered a different road, and we split the swag equal. Now we're but three—which leaves one road not covered. Are you int'rested?"

"Aye. But if I join you, I'll want to ride out at least once with each of you."

"Why?" Smirk demanded.

"To learn the trade. I'm sure I can learn something different from each of you."

Smirk scratched the scar beneath his whiskers, then nodded. "That makes sense," he admitted.

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"Tell me, what *did* Francis do?" the playwright asked.

Smirk scowled. "Since you won't dare talk, I'll tell you. He held up a young gent, who claimed that someone else had just robbed him. Francis expressed his sympathy, then asked him to describe the villain. He described Wallcorn, my daughter Region's husband."

"Why then did you not torture Wallcorn?"

"Because he couldn't have done it. He took sick right after Francis rode off that morning and spent the day in bed."

"Are you sure?"

"Aye. Too many people saw him."

"Then you think Francis robbed the gent and tried to hold out on you—by blaming Wallcorn?"

"Aye."

"Did he confess what he'd taken and where he'd hid it?"

"No, even though before we were through with him, he wished to die."

"What happened?"

"Corriander poisoned him—to put an end to his misery. I thought she were givin' him water, but it were a lye—a lye solution, that is. Well, will you join us?"

"Why not? I'm at loose ends at the moment."

"Good. Come, I'll introduce you to the others. Tell me, what do you call yourself?"

"Hamnet Hathaway—at the moment."

Smirk led the playwright from room to room, introducing him to Gander and Burden, Region and Wallcorn, and finally, Corriander. After which, he excused himself on the pretext of returning to the bar.

Shakespeare dropped onto Corriander's bed, and she made no objection. She was, as Justice Hollow had said, "a lusty, full-figured animal." But if she was upset by her lover's death, she concealed it admirably.

"What do you think of my taking Francis's place?" the playwright asked.

"It depends on what you think his place was," she countered. "If you think you're going to slip into my bed as easily as you slipped onto it, you're badly mistaken."

Shakespeare turned away from her challenging gaze. Glancing out the window, he saw Bicester silhouetted in the distance, its outlines distorted by the imperfect glass.

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"Do you miss Francis?" he asked to fill the silence.

"Why should I? The world is full of fools. I can do better."

"Yet you poisoned him to put an end to his pain."

"I'd do as much for any dog—even you!" she said with a leer, and for the moment she resembled her father.

The playwright suppressed a shiver. "Do you think he robbed the gent?" he asked.

"Why not? After all, robbing were his business."

"What do you think he stole that was worth his life?"

"Nothing! What he stole were worth only his death."

"Did you see the gentleman?"

"Aye. He were a handome devil. He were soft-spoken and knew how to—" She broke off speaking and looked at him sharply.

He was asking too many questions. He needed to get her mind on something else. Rising, he crossed the room, slipped his arm around her waist, and kissed her—and was soundly slapped.

Taking a step backwards, he rubbed his burning cheek. Then he shrugged. "Later," he said enigmatically.

Shakespeare went out early each of the next three mornings with a different highwayman. As they rode from the inn, he questioned them casually about the young gentleman Francis had robbed. The first two mornings he learned more about being a highwayman than he did about the gentleman.

His companion the third day was Wallcorn. The playwright praised his skill, and Wallcorn seemed flattered.

"Why did you not rob the last man?" Shakespeare asked.

"The chamberlain searched his luggage and found naught of value."

"By the way, who was the young gent that Francis robbed?"

"He was a Cecil, a relative of Lord Burleigh. The first time he stayed at the inn, he had naught worth the taking, but when he returned, he carried a leather case that n'er left his hand."

"A jewel case?"

"If it was, it contained the Coronation Crown. It was big enough to hold one of those severed heads on Lon'on Bridge."

"You say he lay overnight at the inn before?"

"Aye. I think he had a taste for Corriander—not that I blame him. I'd like a bite of that apple meself."

"Your wife's as handsome—but why is she so sad?"

"I don't know. She's been weepy since Francis purchased Eternity. Perhaps she realizes that it could easily have been me."

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Later, when they returned to the inn, Shakespeare found Dick Burbage waiting in his room. "This afternoon will have to be our last performance," Burbage said. "We've had small crowds, and Smirk's beginning to look at us with suspicion."

"Then we'll make our move tonight. Find the Sheriff and tell him to surround the inn by ten, then wait for my signal. And while you're in Bicester, purchase rushlights and a bucket of blood."

"Calf's blood?"

"Aye. Did you bring a severed head with you?"

"No. None of the scenes calls for one. But I've the masks we use in the Prologue."

"Good. The Mask of Tragedy will do nicely—for Francis's face was such a mask. Tonight you'll play his ghost outside Corriander's window."

"But the lips don't move," the actor protested. "And how can I mimic a voice I have never heard?"

"Rotate your head. The imperfections of the glass will give the lips the appearance of movement. And make your voice husky. Say that her lye has destroyed your voice box. Be off now! I'll give you your instructions when you return."

It was just after ten when Corriander opened her door to the playwright's knock. The young man pushed past her, shutting the door behind him.

"The answer is no," Corriander said, smiling.

"'Tis not what you think," Shakespeare said, appearing distraught. "I've come with a warning." He glanced at the window and saw that its curtains were fortunately still open.

"A warning?"

"Aye," the playwright answered. "I lay down early this evening, and in a dream, Francis appeared to me, his face twisted with pain, his voice husky, because his lips and throat were burned from the poison you gave him."

"What did he want?"

"For me to kill you and your lover, Cecil."

"Why you?" she demanded.

"Because, in a sense, I have taken his place."

On cue, Burbage tapped on the window, and Shakespeare and Corriander turned and saw through the wavy glass the ghostly "face" of Francis, illuminated from below by rushlights and seemingly floating on air.

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Corriander screamed, but the scream caught in her throat, strangling her. And though he was expecting the ghostly vision, Shakespeare gasped in terror at the sight of the disembodied head.

"Corriander!" the ghost called in a husky whisper. "Corriander! Why did you betray me with Cecil? Why did you give me poison? Was it because of Region? You know my love for her was nothing—a momentary madness."

The head floated towards them. "Reveal your guilt, Corriander! Reveal where you hid the leather case that Cecil gave you! Then, *only then*, will I be allowed to rest in peace. Otherwise I am doomed to haunt you *forever!*"

Suddenly, in a frenzy of torment, the head began to whip back and forth, to and fro, as if from the blows of unseen torturers, their bodies half seen, half imagined in the shadows.

A hand holding a tankard materialized out of the darkness. And the ghost seized the tankard, downed its contents in a single gulp, then dropped the tankard, and put his hands to his throat.

For a moment the head twisted and turned in agony, then the ghost staggered backwards, as if from a fatal blow. The hands plunged downwards out of sight, to reappear almost immediately dripping with blood. The ghost covered his face with his hands an instant before they once again plunged from sight.

Blood dripped in hairy strands from the tortured brow, dripped down the silent face that searched the heavens with sightless eyes. To the playwright, the strands of blood became writhing snakes; the head, Medea's. But not to Corriander. "A wig of blood!" she screamed. "*A wig of blood!*"

A week later, Shakespeare once again sat across the desk from Justice Jennings in the latter's private chambers. The playwright appeared glum, but the Justice was obviously in the best of spirits. "I've had a note from my friend Hollow," he said, raising an imaginary glass in a toast. "He wrote that you have removed the headsman's axe from his neck, and that, though he dare not write more for fear the letter might fall into the wrong hands, you would tell me what transpired. Pray, with victory in hand and your purse bulging with Hollow's thanks, why so glum?"

"Because I've just come from viewing young Cecil's severed head hanging from a pike at Traitor's Gate. It's a sight I'll n'er forget though I live forever. Besides, things were not *exactly* as I'd reasoned."

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He shrugged and began his story: "When Corriander screamed: 'A wig of blood! *A wig of blood!*' " Shakespeare said, "I signalled for the Sheriff and his men to close in, and Smirk and the others were quickly arrested. And when Corriander confessed to everything, they received even quicker 'justice.' As I'd suspected, she was angry at Francis for having made love to her sister, so that when Cecil made advances to her, she was an easy prey and agreed to help him."

"Help him do what?" Justice Jennings demanded.

" 'Rob' himself."

"Rob himself?"

"Aye. He gave his weapons and the leather case to Corriander and she hid them in her room, where we found them. Then, when Francis waylaid him, Cecil claimed that he'd been robbed but moments earlier and gave a description of Wallcorn—so that Corriander could be revenged on her sister. She had no way of knowing, of course, that Wallcorn would have an alibi. Thus, when Francis was tortured, yet would not, could not, confess, Corriander poisoned him, fearing that the others might begin to believe in his innocence."

"But what was taken?" Justice Jennings demanded. "I assume it wasn't the Queen's signet as you originally suggested."

"No, it was a very realistic red wig that Her Majesty had had secretly made in Scotland. Apparently she's bald and quite touchy on the subject, being a woman and vain."

Justice Jennings ran his hand over his own baldpate and nodded.

"Her Majesty entrusted Cecil with the task of transporting the wig, fearing that if a servant were sent to fetch it, he might be indiscrete and reveal what he was carrying, causing her to become the butt of much cruel humour."

"But why would Cecil betray Her Majesty when he was one of her favourites?"

"Because he considered transporting the wig to be a lackey's errand and an insult to his noble birth. Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honour's at the stake. Apparently his courtship of the Queen has been quite stormy. Despite his flattering attentions, Her Majesty did not, at first, trust him. She teased and tormented him—perhaps to shield her emotions, the fact that she *was* attracted to him.

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"I suspect she sent him to fetch her wig either to test him or as proof, at last, of her love. Who can say *what* was in her mind, or *what* is in the mind of *any woman* who has a lover young enough to be her son."

Justice Jennings nodded.

"In the end," the playwright continued, "Cecil betrayed his true nature. Knowing about the highwaymen at the Pied Bull, from a friend who'd been robbed there, he decided to punish the Queen for treating him as a servant *and*, at the same time, to line his purse with a fortune by holding the wig for ransom. Apparently he is one of Lord Burleigh's poor relations, and as you know, living at Court can be damnably expensive."

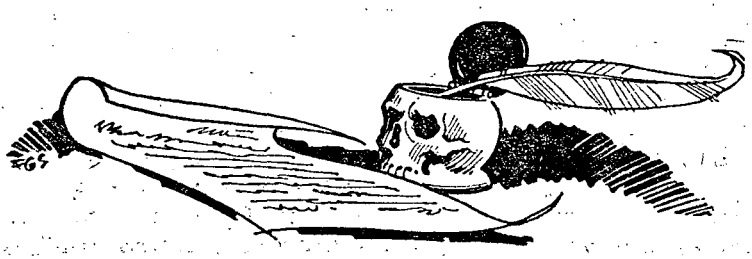
Shakespeare glanced at the Justice's wig on the stand beside his desk. "In truth it *was* 'a wig of blood,' " he concluded. "Five men and three women have lost their lives because of it."

FINIS

Well, Ellery, such was the seed that bore the fruit of *King Lear*. No doubt from this experience Shakespeare learned, as he says in that play: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods. They kill us for their sport!"

With warmest personal regards,

Frank



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SCREAMS AND ECHOES

by DONALD OLSON

Last month I called someone from the State Conservation Department to come over and look at the maples, having noticed how the leaves on the lower branches were turning brown and shriveling up; when I examined one of them I found a black larva wrapped in a sticky web within the folded leaf. I don't suppose the man will come now—not that it matters any more—and even if I wanted to I couldn't call him again: the phone has been removed and now there's no link at all with what lies out there beyond that ragged line of hills—no radio, no TV, no phone.

Not that it can last, of course, nor do I expect it to, even if my daughter Margaret does. "Progress" moves much faster than human life; its hideous tide will engulf us long before any disease has had time to settle within my organs, like that dry black worm in the folded leaf.

Louise was appalled the one and only time she was here.

"A cynic's Eden," she dubbed it sourly. The necessity of leaving her car on the other side of the ridge and taking the footpath the rest of the way had outraged her comfort-conscious body, dulled her appreciation of the sublimity of the view, and

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horrified her exalted sense of the social proprieties—she couldn't believe we had neither friends nor acquaintances out here. The recent death of her husband Larry had given her a less remote view of mortality and put the sort of scare into her for which fifty years of perfect health and pampering had left her unprepared. My sister Louise is neither devious nor tactful; even in childhood I had recoiled from the abrasiveness of her manner, and that jarring encounter with death had rendered her even less inclined to diplomacy.

"I want you both to come—at least for a while," she had said, less than an hour after her arrival. "I'm all by myself in that mausoleum. It's horrid. You've no idea."

Her expression amused me. "Be honest, Lou. How many days have you been alone since Larry died?"

"I'm not talking about the *days*. Of course there are people during the day. I'm not like you, Philip. I'm not a recluse. Thank God I have friends. It's the *nights*, my dear. They're endless and —lonely. Oh, why must you always be so obstinate!"

"Margaret and I are happy here, Lou."

"But I'm not happy *there*."

"Then it's obvious what you must do. You must come and stay with us here."

I knew how unthinkable this would be to her, otherwise I shouldn't have dreamed of suggesting it. It was merely one of those dismal alternatives which, even as a child, she had always rejected.

"That's preposterous, and you know it."

"We've plenty of room. And all the conveniences. And just smell that air, Lou."

She sniffed. "I don't smell anything."

"That's what I mean."

"But it's all so—empty."

She'd soon realized she was getting nowhere with me and turned to what I'm sure had been her original intention: what she wanted, of course, was Margaret.

"It's dreadful for her being stuck out here in the wilderness. It's unnatural."

"Unnatural? Ah, Louise, what a sad commentary on your life that you should find trees and flowers unnatural."

"Oh, stop it, Philip. You know what I mean. I'm talking about Margaret. It's unnatural for her."

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"Nonsense. She's quite happy here. And safe."

"Because she doesn't know any better. It's not fair, Philip. *She's* not a tree—and she won't be a flower forever. She deserves a chance to lead a normal life."

"A life like yours, you mean."

"And what's wrong with that?"

"If you don't know I can't very well tell you."

"But do you really think this is what Rachel would have wanted?"

"Rachel was like you, Louise. Blindly trustful. Your lethal world out there is what killed her. It won't have Margaret, too."

"Don't be dramatic. Germany in '39 was not the *world*."

"Maybe not. But the world has become the Germany of '39."

"You do sometimes spout the most insipid journalese. Even your poetry is tainted with it. That's the trouble with you people. You spend your lives reporting violence. It warps your judgment. You think that's all there is."

"And how often do you take a walk—alone—through Central Park?"

She fussed with her rings. "I'm not saying there's no violence. I'm not that stupid. But hiding from it—that's hardly the answer."

"It's my answer, Lou."

"But must it be Margaret's?"

"You sound as if I'm forcing her to stay here. If you want her to come with you you're quite welcome to ask her."

Margaret had put on her prettiest dress for the occasion of her aunt's visit; although there was not a trace of slyness in the girl's nature her instincts were infallible: Louise's face was frankly approving. My daughter was seventeen at the time. She had her mother's dark hair and eyes, as well as her strong, pure features. Her character, however, was her own. She had none of Rachel's melancholy, and Margaret's zest for life was immediately visible.

Rachel and her entire family had been slaughtered by the Nazis. Louise, by the way, had grossly exaggerated the extent of my career as a journalist. Berlin had been only my second assignment—and my last. During those months I'd become a bridegroom, father, and widower, and had seen enough violence to last me a lifetime. As soon as I could get Rachel's money released from the Swiss bank I'd come home with Margaret and settled here in this wooded, sparsely populated corner of the state close to the peaceful little village where I'd been born. I bought up all

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the surrounding land so that we should be assured of complete privacy. Here I finished my first book of poems, *Screams and Echoes*, and most of *Night-Pieces*.

We had our books and our music and each other, and the task of making the farm self-sufficient was a joyous one. Our gardens and our animals kept us always busy. It was a good life and I knew Margaret would have no desire to follow her aunt back into that arid wasteland where existence is nothing but an aimless flight from boredom or a bitter contest among malcontents.

I was right. Politely but firmly she declined Lou's invitation, and later that evening when she was reading aloud to us I was secretly delighted with the poems she chose.

For thus I live remote from evil-speaking; rancor,
Never sought, comes to me not; malignant truth, or lie.

Speaking from memory, she looked up from the book as she spoke these lines and gave me a secret, blissful smile, and happiness flashed through me like a sudden burst of warmth. I didn't dare glance at Louise; I think the visible expression of such perfect joy would have seemed to her shocking, indecent.

My sister never visited us again, and since she was an indifferent letter writer we never heard from her except during the holidays. The next dozen years brought no change to our way of life, except that both Margaret and the farm grew more beautiful with each passing season. Some witling once wrote that failure in life is to form habits. He was wrong. Happiness in life is to form habits; they are the bar lines that mark off the measures in life's music.

Yet if we remained the same, things around us did not: the ulcer of society was making its cancerous advance upon us. On our more distant rambles we would come across ominous signs: empty beer cans, trampled cigarettes, spent cartridges. In the hunting season the air was filled with the crack and ping of shotgun and rifle.

Stupidly I ignored these omens—until it was too late.

I'll never forget the day they first came. Margaret and I were on the veranda, and I turned to her and said, "Listen. . .is that thunder?"

Even as I spoke I knew it wasn't, for it was already reaching a crescendo that drowned out the strains of the *Pathetique* coming from inside the house. (I often played it at sundown, timing it so that the *adagio lamentoso* coincided with the decline of the sun below the ridge.)

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And then we saw them.

"Look, Father!"

They came one by one bounding over the ridge, hunched low on their roaring motorcycles, silhouetted briefly against the pink-orange sunset, then spinning down the slope—there must have been a dozen of them. The noise was shattering.

Margaret's arm shot out as though in warning. A narrow suspension bridge, a really charming bit of engineering, crossed the river at the foot of the slope; before reaching it the path curved rather sharply, and though I was quite sure the bridge itself could support the weight of the machines, they were approaching it so fast I was sure they would miss the curve and plunge, one after the other, into the rock-filled stream below.

I underestimated them. With the flawless instinct of birds they swept down the path, veered smoothly to the left, and shot over the swaying, bucketing bridge with whoops of glee, turned to the left once more, and raced along the path that borders this side of the river.

When the dust had settled behind them I took Margaret's hand. We were like two mute survivors of an earthquake. "Come up and lie down. I'll call the Sheriff."

"Shouldn't you wait?"

"For what?"

"To see if it happens again."

"Once was too often. There are plenty of signs. They knew this was private property."

Even so, I was unaccountably glad that she continued to urge me to do nothing, and I tried to forget the incident, which wasn't easy since it had a special, unpleasant significance for me. To Margaret they were no more than men on motorcycles. To me men on motorcycles suggested too many grim memories; during those months in Germany I'd seen too many men on motorcycles.

That was the first of what soon became a daily invasion. They came always at the same sunset hour, flying noisily over the ridge and swooping down the slope and across the bridge with their wild, lusty cries. The second time it happened I did call the Sheriff, which accomplished nothing. From the first sound of his gravelly, officious, boozy voice I disliked the man intensely, and when he asked that inane question, "Did they do any damage?" I knew I was dealing with an imbecile.

"They're *tres*passing," I replied with iciest precision of tone, to

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which he merely grunted and said, "Pretty hard to move cross country round here, Mister, without trespassin' on your property, ain't it?"

Every afternoon was shattered now by the roar of their engines and the scream of their lungs, while my hopeless attempt at a confrontation was a farce. I had stationed myself at this end of the bridge and when they appeared made a melodramatic signal for them to stop as they came hurtling down the slope. They pulled up smartly on the other side of the bridge and sat stiffly astride their purring machines waiting for me to make a move. They were all young and suntanned, and though I suppose they couldn't actually have been identically built and featured, they gave this impression because of their common uniform of tight pants, black boots, studded belts, helmets, and gleaming black leather jackets labeled BLACK DOVES.

"This is private property!"

No one moved or spoke.

"All clearly posted. You saw the signs. You're trespassing."

The leader of the pack folded his arms across his chest and laughed. "Hell, mister, we ain't trespassin'. We're just exercisin' our rights of passage."

"Call it what you like, it's still trespassing and it's illegal."

The youth pointed to a flock of sparrows pecking at crumbs Margaret had thrown them. "So's them there birds, if you wanta make somethin' out of it. How come you don't call the Sheriff, man, and have him bust them there birds?"

One of the others giggled. "Hell, he's got enough jailbirds. He ain't fixin' to bust no sparrows. Nor Doves, neither."

The leader stopped smiling. "Move aside, old man, if you know what's good for you."

I moved aside.

When I got back to the veranda where Margaret stood watching I detected on her face a look too gentle to be termed reproof, yet betraying certainly a note of displeasure with my performance. I felt it necessary to answer that look. "What else could I do? They're barbarians."

"Those boys?"

What did she know of boys—or barbarians? "You should have stayed out of sight. You must have seen how they looked at you."

"*Hide* from them?" Something in the innocent-defiant way she said this reminded me of Rachel.

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After that I tried to ignore the daily intrusions, shutting myself in the house and turning the record player up higher, angry at Margaret for refusing to come inside, and disturbed because the feeling of anxiety this gave me was totally devoid of emotional shape. I thought of her standing out there and I imagined it was Rachel standing at the window of our apartment near the Tiergarten watching the Storm Troopers roar into the street on their motorcycles; and yet I knew I was merely using this fantasy to screen from my mind something more immediate and frightening.

What finally caused me to break my silence was the sight of that brash leader of the pack as he swerved away from the others one afternoon, motioning them to go on, and then executed a long, sweeping, rather beautiful maneuver which carried him to a spot just below where Margaret stood. From the window I saw his white teeth flashing, his cocky mannerisms, the sculptural elegance of his body.

Margaret had grown to womanhood in a state of pure innocence in an environment of total peace; but innocence is like a bird without wings if a predator should steal into the garden.

At dinner that evening I remarked that I'd noticed her talking to one of the interlopers.

"Did you, Father?" Her smile treated the subject with thoughtless indifference. "Why didn't you chase him away? He was alone at the time."

"That wouldn't have solved anything."

"I suppose not." She reached for the carrots. We ate for a while in silence, then I said, "I don't mean that we should appease them. I'm not saying that."

"Oh?"

"There are just the two of us. We haven't even the protection of the law."

"Aren't you making a fuss over nothing, Father?"

"You don't know what people are like," I said. "But don't worry. I'll find a way to deal with them."

"How?" Her tone was still playful. "By shutting yourself in the house and pretending you don't hear them?"

"It's safer than displaying yourself to them. If you knew anything at all about the viciousness of the human animal—"

"I'm sorry, Father. I just can't get used to the idea of hiding from anything. I've never had to."

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For some reason this gave me a very guilty feeling, and at the same time it made me all the more determined to have it out with the Sheriff, much as I hated the thought of going into the village. If a community can be said to have a hangdog look, that one does.

His only reply to my complaint was that the cyclists were "good lads" and not the hooligans I seemed to think they were. I got the impression that he recognized only three serious infractions of the law—murder, robbery, and rape—and his detestation of the third was not convincing. He declared that he couldn't be expected to neglect his duty to the electorate by wasting time baby-sitting with a bunch of fun-loving youngsters. That, he took care to emphasize, would be in the nature of extraordinary duties for which he could not expect the taxpayers to defray the cost.

For so thick-skinned a creature he managed to convey the message of his venality with unexpected subtlety; one could only assume he'd had considerable practise.

"Before I'd bribe you to do your duty," I said frigidly, "I'd take a rifle and defend my property myself."

His face darkened. "You just better mind your own p's and q's, mister. Anything happens to them boys—" He looked at me with a deeper, more furtive hostility. "These are simple folks around here. Decent folks. They don't hold with no funny business. Take my advice. You and your girl clear out of these parts."

"I didn't come here for your advice."

"Folks around here, they figger there's a reason when somebody's standoffish. Figger it ain't natural, a man holing up with his own daughter, year after year, all to themselves."

So intense was my loathing for the man that I couldn't bear to look at him again, couldn't get out of his sight soon enough.

That night I asked Margaret what she thought of the idea of moving away.

"Leave the farm, you mean?"

"Yes, Go away. To the Caribbean, perhaps."

"I don't know, Father. I like it here."

"Still, we might think about it."

She didn't answer.

Later, unable to sleep, I got up and walked out past the barn and the chicken house and stood on the bridge looking down at the narrow rushing stream and listening to it bubble over the smooth round rocks which the moonlight made oddly black and

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head-shaped. With a shudder I crossed to the other side and passed up the slope to the ridge, careful not to turn my ankle in the deep ruts worn by the cyclists' spinning wheels.

Up there I stood looking out across the hills to the invisible horizon, and then quickly, as if lost in that dark landscape of infinity, back toward the farm, reshaped by shadows and strangely unfamiliar on the side of the moonlit hill. I thought of Margaret asleep in there, and alone, and I was aware of a vague, mounting dread on her behalf. Something *had* to be done. Something. . .

The very next afternoon the *adagio* of the *Pathetique* was pierced by a sudden sharp scream from Margaret, and at the same time I heard the rending crash of metal on stone and the loud startled cries of the young men.

From the veranda I saw how the bridge dangled loosely from its posts on the farther bank. A welter of black figures moved confusedly in a cloud of dust, and the two injured, or dead—at the moment I had no way of knowing—were being lifted out of the rock-filled river.

Margaret stood rigid and alone halfway between the house and the river. She looked safe to me for the first time in weeks. I was glad it had happened.

To be kept locked up, incommunicado, in that dismal hole of a cell in that filthy jail was bad enough, God knows, but to be vilified and terrorized by that wretched excuse for a Sheriff and his ape-like deputy, neither of whom had evidently ever heard of due process, nearly drove me mad. That the two riders were expected to die of their injuries was only one of the vicious lies they told to torture me; another was that Margaret had made no request to see me. The situation was so grotesque I nearly forgot at times where I was, fully expecting to be roughly awakened in the middle of the night and dragged out to be shot or lynched.

What saved my sanity was one of the Sheriff's most flagrant lies: he said that Margaret confessed to seeing me tamper with the bridge the night before the accident. I knew better than that. Margaret would never have done such a thing.

In the end it was not my threats of legal recourse that won my release, but the financial "compensation" I was forced to pay. Only when I was free did I learn that neither of the two men had been badly hurt.

As I hurried back to the farm I decided it had all been from the

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start an elaborate scheme for extorting money from me. Now, I hoped, we would be left in peace. From the ridge it looked as if nothing at all had happened. Under the hot white glow of the summer sun even the bridge looked as it always had. I wondered who had repaired it. But then as I moved down the slope and crossed the river I saw the first signs of devastation.

The chicken house had been destroyed—what I'd seen from the ridge was only a burned-out shell. The barn was intact but the livestock were missing. More alarming than any of this was the condition of the grounds—deep ruts crisscrossing the whole area, including what was left of the flower and vegetable gardens.

After seeing this I was mortally afraid of going into the house, it was so threateningly silent—a graveyard stillness mocked by the leering impertinent sun.

Outside the door I called Margaret's name. Flies buzzed out of the humid interior, which was dark, as if all the blinds had been shut against the sun, the stale, flannelly heat so palpable you could almost touch it. The room was a shambles of broken furniture and window glass. From the muddy tracks they must have driven their machines throughout the house.

In my study I waded across a carpet of shattered records—not one was left unbroken, nor would I ever again be able to play the *Pathetique* on that machine.

I think I must have aged twenty years in the time it took me to move from the study to the bedroom upstairs. Slowly, slowly, I opened the door.

Margaret, sitting on the edge of the bed, was alive and smiling.

Suddenly dizzy, I put out my hand to grasp the door frame.

She wore a slip which had been torn diagonally from shoulder to hip and was now held together by a pin. Her hair was tangled and had an unwashed look totally unlike Margaret. There were bruises on her upper arms and her lips were swollen.

But it was the smile! That fixed yet curiously unfocused smile that made me break down and weep as I'd never wept in my life, not even when I'd watched them drag Rachel down those endless stairs, her feet bumping horribly on each step.

We should never have stayed; we should have gone away when it first started. "We'll go now," I promised. "Far away. Oh, Margaret, Margaret!"

"Don't be silly, Father," she said, her voice uncannily serene. "We don't have to go now. It's over. We're safe again."

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"Safe. Here? Never. We'll go—"

"Here, Father. We'll have more privacy now right here than on any—island! We've paid for it. They won't bother us again."

"Brutes! Liars! They said I did it. But I didn't, Margaret. I swear to you I didn't. The bridge was old and weak. It couldn't take the constant stress of those machines. But they wouldn't believe me. They even said you'd signed a statement that you'd seen me tampering with it. What did those animals do to you, Margaret?"

"Nothing, Father. Not then. I did tell them I saw you do it."

Mad, mad, I kept thinking. "You—"

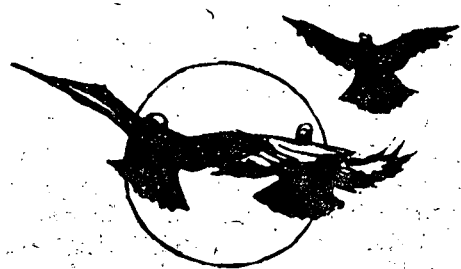
"Told them, Father. Yes. Well, I couldn't tell them the truth—that I was the one who did it."

My lips shaped words I hadn't the strength to speak.

"I did it the night before it happened. Something had to be done, and I knew you would do nothing. Except run away. All these years, Father, the way we've lived. Did you think we would never have to pay for it?"

And I thought it was *her* innocence I'd been protecting. What a fool, what a fool.

The smile on her face softened, became tender, compassionate. Her arms reached out for me. "Come. We must both pretend it never happened. Nothing has changed, you see. Everything is just the way it was. . . ."



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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Although the month has provided no detective novel of classic pattern, or in fact any pattern, my brow remains serene. Can the worst curmudgeon gripe if he gets a pair of fast-paced chronicles featuring cops-and-robbers intrigue, as well as sensational new exploits, the latter in paperback, for each of his two favorite secret agents?

May we never be worse served! Expressing this vain hope, let your mentor begin with the hardcover items—not necessarily from higher quality, but because it's our established procedure. Like all old fogies, I dislike and distrust change.

For any reader who thinks the business world can never become picturesque, *Kill with Style*, by Hal Gulliver (Scribners, $5.95), conjures up picturesqueness both ominous and explosive. After mysteriously firing Jim Roundtree, alert young lawyer, the Troup-Kincaid Corporation mysteriously whistles him back to investigate dirty work at the double-crossroads when Troup-Kincaid plans a multi-million-dollar hotel on Martinique.

It's a luxuriant setting for luxuriant emotion among characters all too human, even amid blackmail or murder. Though warned off by a sinister-seeming intruder called Stroud, Jim Roundtree won't scare. What's behind the discovery of that body in the pool? Who's "Daniel Webster?"

With Roundtree, with Police Lieutenant Vitu, we are held fast until a last deadly moment when the trick cigarette-lighter won't work and all perplexities are triumphantly solved.

In a hypothetical California snake-fanged at every turn, grim place must be awarded to Collin Wilcox's *Long Way Down* (Random House, $4.95), both for concentrated villainy and for ceaseless excitement which seldom pauses even to draw breath.

When philandering Film-Maker Thomas King is stabbed to death in the apartment of the blonde "model," King's wife has already taken a black lover, King's son seems ripe for homicide, and most of them have been dabbling at Emile Zeda's Satanic cult.

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But that's not all. What might have seemed a routine murder case for Lieutenant Frank Hastings unfolds arms of conspiracy like octopus tentacles to seize and crush. Our cop himself barely escapes. The clues accumulate, the scale-pans dip, and, as Hastings invades that Victorian house, the whole grisly pattern emerges in a bullet-torn climax you will not soon forget. Well plotted, well written, well recommended.

And now for expionage. *Assignment—Amazon Queen*, by Edward S. Aarons (Fawcett, 95¢), finds redoubtable Secret Agent Sam Durell, pride of the C.I.A., once more launched like a guided missile at the Bad Guys' newest threat.

World-wide in menace, some unknown genius has invented a device by which all life can be wiped out at any chosen place. And this Doomsday weapon is for sale. Several nations—including America, Russia, Mainland China—have been summoned to bid against each other at a rendezvous up the Amazon in the Brazilian jungle. Cajun Durell, heading a small American team, has been ordered to buy Doomsday's device; buy it or destroy it.

Plagued by attack from outside and treachery from inside, Sam's team batters into enemies all the way. On the river Sam himself finds echoes and memories: the drunken steamboat captain from his boyhood, as well as beautiful African Princess Salduva and her brother. Amid colorful characters we watch jungle violence blaze at that wild auction in another fine adventure for the Cajun and another triumph of storytelling for his creator.

Matt Helm, narrator and protagonist of Donald Hamilton's *The Intimidators* (Fawcett, $1.25), is also a favorite secret agent of the true lethal breed. In the Bahamas on his fifteenth mission for Washington, Matt faces a double task. He must liquidate Pavel Minsky, top Soviet agent on the prowl. He must learn what befell the bride-to-be of Texas Oil Tycoon Bill Haseltine; with her family, on her father's yacht, she has vanished from human ken.

Does danger r ..ly threaten a harmless girl like Lacey Rockwell, oceanographer from Maine? And others besides Haseltine's *fiancée*, including one British newspaper magnate, have vanished from a certain ocean stretch called the Bermuda Triangle or the Sea of Missing Ships.

Our hero, a kind of assassin-philosopher, speculates on the part played by intimidation in everybody's life as by land and waterway he nears wicked truth. Despite the leisurely start, it's a vintage adventure; Matt Helm never lets us down.

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a *NEW* short story by

HENRY T. PARRY

"When would it be recognized that people wear out too, that old people are also entitled to a depreciation allowance?"

DEPRECIATION ALLOWANCE

by HENRY T. PARRY

"How do you plead?"

"Guilty, Your Honor."

"Before sentence is passed, do you have anything to say?"

"Your Honor, I would like it if you would send me to jail right now, if that's how it's done. If you give me a suspended sentence, my son-in-law, Bill Jenkins, is only going to try once again to put me in a home for old folks. Have you ever visited a home for old folks, Your Honor? Retirement homes they call them now, and give them names like Valley View and Sunset Years. Used-people lots is what they ought to call them, and with no resale value either.

"I went to visit old Dutch Smith at Maple Shade. He was tied to a chair with a towel to keep him from slipping to the floor. The place smelled like the hallway outside a public toilet. Half the staff treated them like bad children or as if they were cases of empties being returned for recycling.

"But worst of all were the cheery ones who joshed and kidded the old people as if they were never to be taken seriously and weren't of any real account. I'd rather have a person downright mad at me than to have them say, 'My, we're feeling grumpy today, aren't we?' or 'Watta ya say we step out tonight, Wolf?' All right, I'm old. I can't do anything about that, Your Honor, but I do know that I would rather go to jail than to a home for old folks."

The judge looked at the country man in his town suit, with his neck seamed and weathered in the gaping collar of the new white shirt, his out-of-date broadbrimmed hat

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hanging from thick fingers which shook almost imperceptibly. Gathering up the probation report, the judge tapped the pages neatly together and said, "John Clemson, attempted armed robbery is a serious offense. I sentence you to three years. Sentence is suspended. Court is adjourned."

The old man stood mutely before the bench, the courtroom around him suddenly brisk with the sounds of people who had places to go. He turned and saw Ella Davis, the girl who worked at the checkout counter of the supermarket, standing behind him, with protruding cylindrical curlers making her head look like a scarf-covered gun turret—Ella, who would have been the chief witness against him if the trial had been held. Her good-natured face worked with the effort to say the right words. On the night of the holdup she had not had that problem.

"Now, Mr. Clemson," she had said, "you must be out of your head. Put that gun away, you're shaking it so. At your time of life to be sticking up a supermarket where most everybody knows you and —"

"Ella, give me the money. I'm not out of my head and I'm not going to hurt anybody. I know exactly what I'm doing."

"There ain't so much here, Mr. Clemson. I just came on duty. Now if you was to hold me up later—say, at nine o'clock—there'd be more money here." Her foot slipped to the alarm. When the manager, a new man who had just been transferred from the city, appeared, Clemson handed him the gun, a World War I automatic pistol, unloaded and with the trigger missing. The manager was unversed in the intricacies of country relationships, and the head office was equally so, so charges were pressed. From then on the due process of law had set in.

"Mr. Clemson," the court attendant said softly, "you're free to go now."

Free, he thought, you bet I'm free. They call me a senior citizen. Well, by Jupiter, I'm a citizen, a free American citizen before I'm a senior anything. I'll starve, I'll walk the highways, I'll die in the snow alongside Interstate 80 before they get me into a home! I'm going to die a free man, even if it would have been in jail. Miserable maybe, and guilty. But free.

"Mr. Clemson." The court attendant placed a kindly hand on the old man's arm. "You can go any time you've a mind to."

The old man glanced briefly at the white-haired attendant. Jim Mulcahy, Harry Mulcahy's

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boy, he thought. Harry who was with me in the 102nd Engineers, blowing up wire and emplacements and anything else in the Argonne that needed blowing up. We used to take turns, one wiring and placing the charges, the other pushing the plunger. Once I pushed it too soon and when Harry came back to our hole he didn't have any pants, just naked from his puttees up. All he said was: "Kinda impatient, ain't you, John?" Let's see, Harry must be dead now, what, ten years maybe.

"Dangerous old coot, ain't he?" he heard the attendant whisper. "You better watch yourself, Bill, he might have some plans for you next time."

"Come on, old man. Let's get going. You've made enough trouble and you got off mighty lucky."

Bill Jenkins, his son-in-law, stood beside him, burly in his checkered mackinaw, red-faced from working outdoors in the prairie winter. Together they went down the marble steps of the courthouse to the parking lot where the Civil War statue stood sentinel to an encampment of cars.

"Wait here in the car. I got to pick up some things," Bill said.

The old man settled himself in the front seat. Waiting is what old people do the most of, he thought, and they know what they're waiting for. He picked up the reminder list Bill had left on the seat. *Deposit check*, he read. That would be for the sale of the timber. Black walnut and oak that had stood since before the farm was homesteaded by his grandfather, home from Stone's River and Missionary Ridge. He could still hear the snarling of the chain saws when the lumbering crew had taken out the trees, leaving raw stumps. "That land goes into soybeans," Bill had said.

The next item on the list bore out his intention. *Dynamite*, it read. Bill would spend the winter blasting out the stumps and when the frost was out of the ground he would go in there with the big tractor and plow. *Quarter-inch bolts.* He laid the list aside.

But it was his own fault, wasn't it, that he was penniless in his old age? He had deeded the farm to his daughter and when she was killed in a car accident, the terms of her will conveyed the farm to her husband. Within a year Bill had remarried, to Anna Johnson who was the teller at the local bank. Bill was a good farmer, thorough and hard-working, and attentive to detail, but the gossip was that Bill had married

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Anna to get someone to relieve him of the paperwork. If so, he succeeded for Anna took over with drive and a certain amount of dry zeal, coupled with considerable aggressiveness in dealing with the various agencies of government designed to help farmers.

In the county agent's office it was said that the agent broke out in simulated tears on being told that Mrs. Jenkins was on the phone and would speak to no one but him. Anna had scored a minor triumph, too, in the matter of depreciation allowances on farm equipment, pointing out a method whereby larger amounts could be taken early in the life of new equipment and demonstrating the economics of replacing old equipment with new to obtain higher and faster write-offs against taxes.

It had been Anna's suggestion, well supported by figures, that caused Bill to sell the timber. Something to do with capital gains. How, the old man wondered, had his father and grandfather ever been able to farm without benefit of capital gains and depreciation allowances? When would it be recognized that people wear out too, that old people are also entitled to a depreciation allowance?

Two months after Anna moved into the farm as Bill's wife, Clemson moved out of the house and partitioned off crude living quarters in the corner of the barn where the equipment was stored and repaired. The separation had been, if not amicable, at least quiet and civilized. He had not explained his reasons, and they had asked him for none, happy to accept what they regarded as a windfall. His reason was that he could no longer bear to see a stranger where his grandmother, mother, wife, and daughter had been.

Anna was not the one who first suggested that Clemson would be better off in a retirement home. Anna was for letting nature take its course in the partitioned-off corner, knowing with her actuarial sense that the years remaining to the old man were few. But Bill was sensitive to the talk of neighbors, to the oblique references, and had defensively and heatedly pointed out it was the old man's wish, not his, to live in the barn. He had come into the barn one day when Clemson was working on the tractor engine and handed the old man several envelopes.

"When you get a chance, read these and we'll talk about it. I want you to think seriously about what's in them. And let's think about setting a date."

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The envelopes contained illustrated brochures describing several retirement homes—happy, contentment-filled places where young-old men in shorts rode three-wheeled vehicles that gave rise to unintentional but disturbing associations with childhood, and where smiling foursomes sat at bridge, the ladies' hair set as if by precision instrument, with highball glasses discreetly but comfortably sunk in holders at the side of the table; sunny vacation spots where everything, everything, was taken care of.

He compared the literature with what he knew from his experiences in visiting old Dutch Smith at Maple Shade and tossed it into the trash drum. I'm poor, I'm old, he thought, and I'm not wanted here no matter how I stay out of the way, no matter how I try to help where I can. But they will never get me into one of those places. Nor into the county home either. It was then that he decided that the only institution he could honorably enter was prison, and had set about planning the purposefully inept holdup that would send him there. But now the suspended sentence had barred that solution.

Bill Jenkins slammed the trunk compartment shut and squeezed in behind the wheel.

"Got enough dynamite back there to blow us all the way back to the farm."

These were the only words spoken until Bill drove into the barn and parked, the car looking citified and dandy beside the blunt rural usefulness of the tractor and plows. The old man started for his room when Bill paused in unloading the car, came over to him and stood close, his hard muscular bulk bulging over the old man's thin toughness.

"There's going to be no more cute tricks, old man, making Anna and me look cheap. Making it look like jail was better than staying here with us."

"Bill, that just ain't so. You wanted to put me in a home for old folks. I'd been satisfied to live here in the barn but you don't really want me on the place. So I'd rather go to jail than rot away in a home for old folks. Nobody's going to budge me from that."

"We'll see, old man, we'll see. Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock I want you to be sitting in the front seat of that car. You and me are going out to Maple Shade and that's where you're going to stay. And there ain't nothing you can do about it. Come on now, why do you make me get tough with you?

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Henry Smith says his father is there and the old folks all have a pretty good time together."

Clemson remembered Dutch Smith, who had once had a tryout with the Cubs, straining helplessly against the towel that kept him from pitching to the floor. It would never happen to him. Never.

"Remember. Eight tomorrow. Get packed tonight and I hope you got the good sense not to make any more trouble. I've stood the last from you I'm going to stand."

He left the old man standing in the gathering darkness, surrounded by the depreciable equipment of modern farming. To be old, Clemson thought, may put you at the mercy of others, but it does not necessarily mean you are helpless.

He cooked his simple supper on the two-plate burner, listened to the news on the radio, and began gathering his clothes for packing. Realizing that he was already wearing his good suit, he picked up his remaining clothes and threw them into the trash drum. He tucked the pictures of his wife and daughter into his pocket. One more thing and he would be ready to go.

He walked out into the darkness of the barn and without turning on the lights picked up the items he would need. Long forgotten reflexes came to his aid as he worked in the dark. When he had finished, he walked in the early winter night down the lane to the highway.

Two miles along the road he turned into Chubby's Diner where the long-haul truckers stopped, and stood in the gelid light of the neons beside a row of parked trucks. A driver came out of the diner, flipped away his cigarette, and prepared to mount to the cab that loomed over the old man.

"Excuse me, mister," Clemson said, "I wonder could you see your way clear to give me a lift to"—he hesitated, then picked a town 300 miles west on the Interstate—"to Seneca Falls. I won't talk much or make any bother. I—I got some folks waiting there to meet me. They're real anxious to see me and now that I don't drive any more—I know they'd be real glad to see me."

The trucker looked appraisingly at him, a retired farmer in his town clothes, harmless enough, no trouble, weighed the "No Riders" sign against the boredom of the endless Interstate, and helped the old man climb into the cab. The diesel sprang to life, the rig stalked warily to the highway's edge, and roared onto the road.

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Maybe Anna could figure out how much depreciation allowance an old man was worth: expected remaining life, short; estimated salvage, zero. All he knew was that you had to set your own values, that a man can be free only if he insists on being free, and is willing to sacrifice everything else.

Riding high in the snug dimness of the cab, he watched the darkness fleeing westward before the headlights, and saw the limitless prairie circle slowly away on each side of the road, locked in winter, waiting for spring to soften and open it. With spring Bill, having blasted out the last of the tree stumps, would get ready to plow what had once been the woodlot. When he went to start the tractor's engine, the little bundle wired to the ignition circuit would do its work, just as though the man sitting in the driver's seat were a tree stump.

"Q"

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This is the 411th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .a beautiful story, poetic and lyrical, but with a dread heartbeat. . .

The author, Mary Amlaw, is in her mid-thirties "and holding"; single "and husband-hunting"; with a typical "writer's potpourri"—schoolteacher, social worker, public relations work, and "mostly a classical musician."

"This last year," Miss Amlaw wrote us, "I decided to go for broke"—become a full-time writer. "I got a lot of letters saying, 'We loved your story so much it breaks our heart to have to return it.' " Well, Miss Amlaw's first story broke our heart too—but we did not return it.

Miss Amlaw's hobbies reveal the woman: "writing, reading, concertizing. People. Psychology. Bridge, chess, hiking, bowling, beachcombing, stargazing." We cannot resist one more quotation from her letter: "In all seriousness I'm aiming at becoming a 'compleat' writer. I have to. I've been so hooked on it all my life that if I were stranded on a desert island, I'd write with bone fragments on pieces of tree bark." Oh, how proud we'll all be of her one of these days!

"Shule, shule, shule agra,
Only death can ease my woe.
The love of my heart from me did go,
Cathutheen, mavourneen slaun."

FAREWELL, BELOVED

by MARY AMLAW

This day a great shame has come to our house. That is what my papa says. He shouted it at me, and at my mama, and at my brother Sean. "Tell me who it was did it," he roared, shaking his fist in Sean's face. "Who was it met her all summer on the hill?"

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My mama wails, "Hush yourself, Paudeen, and don't be lifting your hand in anger this day. My heart is breaking."

I ask her why is her heart breaking? But she only pushes me from her and cries on.

Upstairs Father Robinson sits by my sister Kathleen. He is the only stranger my papa has ever let come under our roof. Sean says my papa is mad. Sean says if we could get away from here, we would find the world much different than things are here. But we will never get away. Sean tried to and had to come back. Kathleen never even tried. I would go if I was old enough to get to a town without being stopped and sent back.

My papa let Father Robinson go upstairs and sit by Kathleen. She is dying from having a baby too soon. My mama says it will be a blessing if the poor blind babe dies with her. My papa swore that Kathleen for shame would have neither priest nor prayers to bury her. He is angry with Sean for bringing Father Robinson here. In spite of my mama's tearful shushings he cannot hold his anger. He backs Sean into the wall, roaring, "Who brought this disgrace on her? Tell me, or you'll be lying in the grave with Kathleen, and it will be my fist put you there!"

But Sean says not a word.

Father Robinson comes slowly down the stairs, such a strangeness about him that even my papa looks as he descends. Mama sniffles into her apron and papa looks and looks, his fist full of Sean's collar.

"The girl is dead," the Father says.

My mama weeps with great noise. My papa glares.

"No," Sean says low. "No. Not dead?"

The Father nods. "Gone. Gone in peace. God have mercy on her soul." His bright black eyes move from Sean's face to my papa's fist gripping Sean's collar. My papa turns Sean loose.

"Did she confess herself?" my papa asks. "Did she name the blackguard who shamed herself and us?"

"He cannot tell," Sean says. "It is privileged matter—not one word can he say." He stands spread against the wall under the foxskin my papa nailed there last winter, his eyes cold and bright.

"Who are you to forbid me to ask after my own daughter?" my papa roars. "Is this why I sent you off to your uncle, to have you come back cocky and bold, daring to raise your hand to me now you stand so tall? Fair ruined you are, come back to me sick and unfit for work, and making my daughters heedless as yourself!

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Where is the fortune you were going to make us if we let you go off to study? Pipedreams! What have I out of it? A son too sickly to work my land and a daughter disgraced and dead!" He shoved Sean hard against the stairwell. "I'll have no defiance in my own house. You'll tell me who it was or go from my roof this night!"

Sean came home because Kathleen sent for him. But my papa doesn't know that. He thinks Sean couldn't find work to keep himself when my uncle died.

"Paud, you'll not turn him out!" my mama cries weakly. "And him with the fever coming and going on him all the winter past."

She says it because Father Robinson is there, watching. She has seen Sean go coughing to the fields at my papa's word, the fever on him and rain coming down thin and cold, and she said nothing to save him. Sean says she has no feeling for us, but Kathleen always said, "No, there you are wrong. She is worn out with work and the old devil's temper. She is not unfeeling, but only weak."

My papa keeps Sean pinned against the stair. He is strong, my papa. Sean laughs short and hard into his face. The Father looks at them both, his mouth pulling down. I wonder how much Kathleen has told him. Enough for him to help me run away?

"How terrible was her sin, Father?" Sean cries out. "More terrible than his who promised her to Mick Farrell come summer, and him with two wives already buried by hard living with him?" He could hardly talk with papa's hand so close to his throat. "What had she to confess? It was I told her she did no wrong to love. And she believed me. She was innocent. She believed me. Let what sin there is be on my head. She was sinless."

Sean's eyes get very bright. The Father puts his hand on Sean's shoulder. Sean's head falls low and lower over the Father's black sleeve. Almost I think he is crying.

"God is merciful, son," the Father murmurs. "Who can say it is not as you tell it?"

"Am I bound then to give her poor secret to this drunken sot that fathered us, for him to spread about making her name a dirty thing, a thing to laugh at and repeat in the taverns and fields with a snicker?"

The Father's fingers move against Sean's thin shoulder. "To lie is forbidden," he says softly to Sean. "Nothing forbids silence."

My papa shouts, "I am the authority in my house!"

Sean doesn't even look at him. But the Father watches. I wonder how much Kathleen has said. She always made me

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promise to say nothing. "It is our grief, and we will overcome it," she promised me. "We will leave here, you and I and Sean. Then nothing that happened here will matter. But if people learn the old devil is mad, they will be afraid of us, and think we are mad, too."

My papa comes heavily across the bare floor to me. I would run but he would catch me later, alone, when no one would be near to help me. So I stand quietly as his big hands fall on my shoulders.

"You'll tell me what I must know," he says. "You're my fine girleen, Maura! Who was it met with yourselves and Kathleen on the hill last summer, when I wasn't about to see for myself?" His hands grip my shoulders down to the bones. Sean moves fast as fire across the room to me.

"Let her be," he growls. "She knows nothing."

My papa's hands dig harder into my shoulders. I don't dare wriggle away, but Sean sees on my face that those big hands hurt.

"Knows nothing?" my papa says. "Wasn't it yourself told me she knew letters and numbers and writing as well as yourself, and must go to school to learn more?" My papa shook me lightly. "Come now, Maura. Do you know so many things, and not know one face and the name that goes with it?"

"She never saw anyone but ourselves," Sean says for me. "The climb always wore her out, and she slept. She knows nothing." His hands come under my chin and lock around my face. I feel brave with Sean behind me, and look straight at my papa. Silence was not forbidden. Father Robinson had said so.

"So that's the way of it." My papa looks down at me. Sean's hands tremble on my face. The fever is on him and it is like being touched by worms of fire. Like fingers of sun brushing me when I slept on our hill.

I loved the hill. It was always bright and safe and warm, the sun thick and dry in the long grass, and Kathleen singing songs into my hair. Sean would tell us of our uncle's farm and tell us things to laugh at until the sun made me sleepy. Even when I felt him lift me from Kathleen's arms and put me down in the grass in my half sleep I was never afraid. When I woke I stayed where I was, dreaming happy things into the cloud shapes until shadows stretched cold down the afternoon. Then Kathleen would come to me laughing and a murmuring breeze sprang up around her. Twigs and pretty green things littered her hair. I'd brush it clean for her.

"Maura knows nothing," Sean tells my papa. "Nothing."

My papa rubs his chin. I know by the flat look of his eyes what

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he will do to Sean and me when Father Robinson is gone. Sean knows, too. His hands stay on my face to keep me brave.

"This," says the Father, "is a sorry task to lay on a child."

My papa lets me go. "Keep your secret then." His face is twisted with anger. "I'll learn the name I want from the babe itself. Its own face will tell me its father soon enough."

My papa's face is black. I am glad for the rain rattling the window. If it were quiet, he might hear how fast I am breathing and think I am hiding something from him.

"Run to your room now," Sean whispers. He gets between me and my papa and leans against the wall while I climb the stairs. My papa watches me all the way to the top, squinting his eyes at me and rubbing his whiskery chin, rubbing and rubbing.

"You baptized the babe?" I hear him ask the Father. "By what name?"

"The name the poor girl gave me," the Father said. "Sean."

"Sean, is it?" says my papa in a voice that makes me shiver even with all the stairs behind me. "There's not that many Seans about to hide the one I want."

"Paud, don't disgrace us before the Father," my mama says. "Kathleen is dead. Let her rest in what peace she can find."

"Sean, is it," my papa says again. "Sean."

"She'd not call the babe by its father's name," my mama says, "for the bad luck it would bring on both."

Then the Father says, "Why has the little girl never come to school? I must speak to her and see what learning she has."

Moving shadows go down the long upstairs hallway to the room where my Kathleen lies. Someone—Sean or the Father or my mama who helped the baby get born—left a long white candle burning by the bed. It throws gold over Kathleen's still face and makes firepoints wink in and out of her black hair.

She was sleeping quietly. I was glad, for most nights she slept little. Often the last winter months I'd wake to find her weeping over me, the moon a ghostly glitter at the window beyond.

"It's the dreams upset me," she confessed. "They say I will soon die. Maura, if the dreams are true and the Dullahan takes me off, will you pray for me?"

I couldn't understand her tears or her urgency. Often she took me from my bed and held me while stars littered the sky. "Second sight is on me," she said unevenly, "and hard are the things it shows me. Sean, choking of a sudden in the mud of a far field,

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thin as sparrow bones, the blood of his sickness a bright stain on the ground. Flowers spring up there, blood-red flowers. I am in the earth. Over my head stands weeds." She fringed my face with kisses. "And you, Maura, there is no escape for you either. Poor Maura. Poor Maureen." Her voice mourned like the sea.

She told me then how to care for the baby to come, to keep it warm and dry and feed it often with a rag dipped in warm milk. And I must keep it quiet, and not let it cry when the papa could hear, lest it anger him into beating it to death. She made me say it all back to her, time after time, then she rocked back and forth with me in her arms until the moon died in the black night. Sometimes Sean would hear us and wake, and carry me to my bed. Then he would quiet Kathleen as she quieted me until she could sleep a little.

Now she slept with no tossing or evil dreams. A bit of string held most of her hair, and the candle beside the bed threw gold shadows over her face. She seemed to smile in the candle glow.

A thin mewing came from the cradle under the window. I went to it and lifted Kathleen's baby out. He was warm in my arms. I rocked him and he hushed.

His eyes were shut tight. That's why my mama said he was blind, because his eyes didn't open. I sat on the floor by his cradle and tucked his dark head into the base of my neck, and kissed him, and he hushed.

My mama came into the room. She never noticed us, but began to wash Kathleen. She worked fast, my mama. Sean came to the doorway and leaned against the frame. "The Father's gone," he said, "but he's coming tomorrow to see about Maura."

My mama didn't answer. She tugged Kathleen's gray dress over her head and reached for the brown dress on the chair.

"Must she wear rags even in her grave?" Sean growled.

"She has no better," my mama said without looking at him.

"Wait." Sean prowled through Kathleen's things and dragged out a handful of filmy blue stuff. Mama reached out but the stuff, so light, so pretty, floated away from her touch.

"Where did she get such a dress?" my mama asked in a cracked voice.

"I brought her the goods home from Dermott's with me," Sean said. "She made it up nights."

"You brought me nothing," my mama said.

Sean spread the filmy skirt over Kathleen. He took the string

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from her hair and brushed at the hair with his fingers. Over and over, over and over his fingers sifted the feathery dark weight of Kathleen's hair.

My mama slapped Sean's hand away. "You'll not touch her!"

Sean lifted his head. My mama moved thin as frost to the window. "I'm not blind as the misbegotten babe," she rasped. "Couldn't I see the look of her after she'd been with you? Only a woman loved looks that way. And now this—the babe, blind, and 'Sean' as well!"

Sean's eyes glittered like blue fire. They seemed to stand out of their sockets. Everything else about him was still.

My mama hugged her thin arms. A bitter smile twisted her face. "Deny it, then!" she said. "Deny it. You can not!"

Sean's face hardened like the rock floor of the pasture pond. He lifted his hand as if to strike my mama. Blacker and blacker went his face. He was on his feet and coming at my mama. She backed against the window. Her head came up.

"I will not unsay what I have said," she told him spitefully.

Sean didn't hit her. He let his hand fall and swept it towards the door. My mama slithered out and down the stairs. Sean stared after her, his eyes still glittering. Then he knelt on the floor by Kathleen's bed and buried his head next to hers. Hoarse choking sounds came from him that made a hurt inside me. I laid the baby in his cradle and stood by Sean. He didn't know I was there until I touched his shoulder.

"Maura," he whispered. "Were you here all this time?" Gray streaks ran down his face. I was afraid of his face so gray, the eyes so black. I nodded.

"You heard what she thinks of me?" He put his arm around me. Heat came off him like a fireplace.

"Are you crying because Kathleen is dead?"

"No. Because I am not."

This morning Kathleen had stood by the table cutting bread while Sean brought water from the well. The rains had not come but the air was full with the smell of them. My papa squinted at Kathleen standing so pale and quiet at the bread. He rose from his place and dragged her into the square of sunlight on the floor. My mama got up as he pulled Kathleen's skirt tight into his big fist.

The patch of sunlight vanished.

"Paud!" my mama cried as he lifted his heavy hand. "If you

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touch her you'll kill her, she's too far gone!"

My papa thrust Kathleen from him. She fell against the table. He came after her and pulled her head up by the hair.

"Paud!" my mama shrieked.

My papa lifted Kathleen by her hair and her elbow. He held her against the wall. I ran to the well for Sean. One look at me and he sprinted for the house, cursing my papa as he came.

Kathleen lay crumpled like sand on the floor. Her skirt showed blood. My papa stood rocking over her. "I scarce touched her," he said to the walls. "Scarce put my finger to her!"

Kathleen reached for Sean. "The baby," she sobbed. "Sean!"

Her cry went through me. Sean crouched beside her. "Be quiet," he said. "Save your strength." He pulled her little by little into his arms, pulling gently to keep her from screaming again. Sweat glistened all along her hairline. She closed her eyes and hung gasping against him.

"Kathleen!" I cried, scared. "Kathleen!"

She opened her eyes. "The dreams were true," she panted. Her eyes were glazed, the way fever sometimes does to Sean's. "You remember all I told you, how to take care of my baby?"

I nodded. "Ah, Maureen, poor Maureen," she gasped. "I saw worse for you than for us. God love you, mavourneen." She shuddered and dug her fingers into Sean's shoulder. She screamed.

The house echoes still with the sound of it. Even when the rains started hard and heavy they could not beat out the sound of her screaming.

"You must pray for Kathleen," Sean said. He held me close against him. "Look well at her and learn her face."

Kathleen's long lashes hung like bruises against her cheeks. Bits of hair still damp with her struggling curled against her forehead. But the blue vein in her temple was still, and the pulse beat no longer like a bird in her throat.

"That devil downstairs will give Kathleen neither cross nor stone to comfort her," Sean said.

"Weeds will stand over her," I said from her dream.

"You must find where they put her," Sean said. "Go there sometimes and throw a flower into the grass for her, and say her a prayer so she won't lie forsaken."

I nodded my head. "Won't you come, too?"

"No. I'm leaving, Maura. I would take you but you'd be no

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better off, there is death in me. Father Robinson will come for you, if not tomorrow then the day after. He will help you. Go with him, Maureen. Do not let him leave this place without you. Say it!"

"Father Robinson will help me," I repeated. "He will come and I must go with him. The Father will help me."

Downstairs I heard the floor creak under my papa's weight.

"Go now," Sean said. "Run to your room and close the door. That devil and I have bitter words to speak between us."

"Sean?"

He kissed the top of my head. "Go. Go, mavourneen."

I went as my papa came lumbering up the stairs. He moved thick and heavy past me, my mama weeping at his heels.

"Don't curse the boy, Paud!" she moaned. "The evil is done. For the love of God don't call down more on this house!"

I hid my head under my pillow but it didn't block out my papa's voice measuring out a slow and terrible fate. That was why Sean would die alone in a muddy field. He was cursed.

Sean and my papa shouted in the room where Kathleen lay sleeping in her narrow white bed. They roared and hurled oaths at each other. Sean began to cough, long racking coughs that kept on and on, and on, and still my papa shouted, "Deny it or give me another's name!"

At last Sean went clattering down the stairs. The door thudded shut behind him.

I ran to the window and leaned out into the rain.

He was splashing through the wide puddles, his head bent to the wind.

"Sean!" I called. He didn't hear.

"Sean!" I cried. "Don't leave me, Sean!"

He paused as if the wind had brought him my voice. I leaned over the sill, my hair falling black and heavy around me.

"Sean!" I wailed. "Sean, Sean, Sean!"

The keening wind brought my cry back to me. Sean turned and threw me a kiss, and lifted his arm in farewell. Then he wheeled and walked on.

I watched until he was only a blue blur against our hill, running green with the March rain.

The house is full of strange footsteps sent by the Father to carry Kathleen away. I will follow and find where they buried her.

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I will say her a prayer, and throw her a flower into the grass so she won't lie forsaken.

Tonight, when he sleeps, I will go to my papa. I will take the breadknife Kathleen used this morning with me. I will stand over him and lift my arms high and straight over his heart.

I will plunge the breadknife deep into his chest. Once for Kathleen, once for Sean, once for me.

I will dress the baby and myself and wait until the Father comes. We will put a cross on Kathleen's grave. Papa won't be able to stop us. Then the baby and I will leave and find Sean and never come back.

The Father will help. The Father will help me. Sean said it would be so.

NEXT MONTH...

10 NEW stories — including

EDWARD D. HOCH *(about Interpol)*

ISAAC ASIMOV *(about the Black Widowers)*

H. R. F. KEATING *(about a dentist)*

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH *(about horror)*

and an Honor Roll reprint by

ROSS MACDONALD *(about Lew Archer)*

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This is the 412th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .an unusual and interesting mystery debut. . .

The author, Barbara Callahan, was 39 when she submitted her first story; she is married, with five children ranging in age from five to fourteen. Before marriage she was a schoolteacher majoring in French.

Her husband is the Assistant State Auditor of New Jersey. The whole family loves camping and they have traveled in a rented Winnebago from the St. Lawrence in Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

Mrs. Callahan's hobbies are simple: reading and writing. She calls herself "a near-klutz at cooking and a real one at sewing." (Somehow we don't quite believe that.)

"I would like to be a writer more than anything," her letter went on. "I had completed 58 pages of a novel which has been moldering in a drawer for the past half year. I didn't have the heart to continue working on it because I was convinced I was deluding myself about being able to write." Well, we are happy to report that EQMM's acceptance of her first story has changed all that, and Mrs. Callahan has gone back to her novel with a replenished heart. Carry on, Mrs. C.!

THE SIN PAINTER

by BARBARA CALLAHAN

Retracing the series of events that shattered my tranquil existence is like running a motion-picture film backward. I'm sitting on a bench looking out at the sea, and the film keeps intruding. Images of two lost friends and a weatherbeaten barn skip crazily on the horizon.

Where shall I stop the film? I suppose at the central point. So I'll focus on a sign dangling from two rusty hooks at the Crafts Barn. It reads: Macramé, Découpage, Carvings, Portraits,

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and Sin Painting. Sin Painting—an intriguing illusion, an x-ray of the soul through the penetration of art, or a novel come-on devised by young artists to peddle their wares?

Sin painting—the silent shill that lured us into the barn. Valerie's husband and Martha's both told us about the sign. They had seen it on the way to a golf course in the New Jersey countryside. They knew of Valerie's unceasing quest for diversion and they thought this would be just her cup of tea.

Valerie is in her forties, heavy-set and good-humored, but restless. She was convinced that in a previous incarnation she had been a gypsy roaming the highways in an unending odyssey of discovery. The problem was how to fit a gypsy soul into the substantial chassis of a wealthy matron.

The unleashing of the gypsy occurred once a week when Valerie cruised to my door in her foreign sports car. We'd pick up Martha, the wife of Valerie's husband's business partner, then set out for parts unknown. Valerie would conquer the highway, then abruptly turn off to a random side road. We'd pass housing developments fringed with adolescent trees until we'd reach a single-lane road, our corridor into the unexpected.

Once we stopped at a bungalow that housed the powers of Sister Solace who read our fortunes. A flea market snared us another day. Valerie paid $100 for a Portuguese water jug after being solemnly assured it had served Vasco da Gama. She escaped with only sunburn when we stopped at a pick-it-yourself strawberry patch.

Martha and I followed our gypsy to a nudist camp, discreetly tucked off the beaten path, which naturally was our path, where we listened for two hours to the manager's description of health *al fresco*. We chanced on a glassblowing settlement, a horse auction, and a brush fire for which we turned in the alarm and whose dousing we watched like fascinated schoolchildren.

I enjoyed these outings with Valerie although in a previous incarnation I was probably a settled soul. Valerie's jaunts helped to dispel the depression that had gnawed at me since my husband's death. I don't have enough money to go out on my own when the blues descend, and Valerie, good neighbor and good friend, included me and paid for everything.

Martha, although she never said it, looked forward to our romps with the same enthusiasm one would reserve for two hours of root-canal work.

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Her lovely face was always drawn when she entered the car. I could understand because less than three months ago Martha planned to run off to Tahiti with Valerie's husband.

The telltale plane tickets were discovered by Valerie while checking John's suits to be cleaned. She began to hyperventilate. Gasping and sobbing, she phoned me and I took her to the hospital. John came immediately. He was grief-stricken and repentant. He confessed and vowed the affair between him and Martha would be over.

Martha's husband, Howard, came to the hospital too, and heard everything. The next day the four of them met and discussed the problem in an adult and civilized manner. The men swore that the business would not be affected. They would remain partners and friends. Valerie kissed everyone and dispensed her forgiveness. Everyone cried, except Martha.

When John told Valerie about the Sin Painting he said, "You don't have any sins, dear, but I thought you and the girls might check it out and bring us back another adventure story."

Valerie clucked delightedly at John's evaluation of her soul. She protested that she might have one or two little sins, and that the Sin Painter might do a "Dorian Gray" job on her.

She related this exchange to us on the way to the Sin Painter's. Martha said nothing. I felt a sense of uneasiness which I attributed to Martha's silence and a gloomy drizzle that runneled the windshield. Several times I wanted to turn back but I was sure Valerie wouldn't consent.

The sign creaked in the wind when we got out on a board that bridged the mud by the barn. There were five young people inside, working in sections of the barn assigned to their craft. A blonde girl tying macramé knots smiled at us.

"Where is the Sin Painter?" Valerie asked.

The girl laughed, and Martha shivered. I think she considered the girl's laughter obscene, as out of place as a joke at a funeral.

"Up there," she grinned, and waved toward the loft.

We walked to the ladder in single file. When we reached it, Martha tried to dissuade Valerie from climbing.

Valerie beamed. "Nonsense, I used to be a good gymnast. Don't let these extra pounds fool you."

Within seconds she had scaled the ladder and beckoned for us to follow.

"Ahab is calling us to the whale," Martha said softly. It was my turn to shiver.

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The loft was presided over by a bearded young man. He was completing the face on a ship's figurehead.

"You are the Sin Painter, I presume?" Valerie asked.

He nodded.

"I suppose business is always booming in your line," she chirped. "Here are three vestal virgins to be sacrificed at the altar of truth. Do you need clues, or do you proceed, psychic-like, without any help from us?"

He shrugged. "I just paint what I feel."

"Oh, I see," Valerie said, "it's vibrations."

"No, lady," the artist sighed. "No vibes, no ESP."

"I'll go first," Valerie announced. "You'll pick gluttony as my sin, I'm sure. I *am* overweight."

She grinned as she sat down. "Gluttony should be depicted as a roast pig with an apple in its mouth."

I glanced at the artist, who was scowling. Martha sat down on an old milk can. The young man set up his easel to the accompaniment of Valerie's banter.

"Or gluttony could be a Henry Eighth type banquet, don't you think, young man?"

"Ma'am, I paint your head and shoulders—no pigs, no banquets."

Valerie looked triumphant. "An instant Dorian Gray!"

"Sit still," the artist hissed. Valerie obliged.

Martha began to pace the loft. She examined more ship's figureheads and a group of tavern signs, all antiqued to look like originals. Wooden weather vanes attracted her next, and she spun them around.

I was tempted to see how Valerie's portrait was coming, but the artist's sullenness discouraged me.

"Okay," he said finally.

Valerie came to life again. "You're finished? You've painted bulbous cheeks and a bloated expression?"

The artist ignored her. She walked to the easel, but he blocked her way.

"When I've finished all of you, then you can look."

"Artistic temperament," Valerie cooed.

When I sat down, Martha was far across the loft staring into space. Valerie went below to browse. I didn't try to guess which sin would appear on my face. The truth was, I felt foolish about the whole affair.

When Martha posed, her face was a study in fear. I wondered how the artist could draw her as anything but a frightened woman. But fear isn't a sin.

I could hear Valerie laughing below and I became uneasy. I

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realized that all our trips had been agonies for Martha. Valerie was killing her with forgiveness, and today's trip had to be the most humiliating of all. Was Valerie hoping that the right sin would appear on Martha's face?

When the artist finished, he put the third sketch face down on a table. Valerie's timing was excellent. Her head bobbed through the opening to the loft.

"Let's have a peek into our souls," she said.

"Thirty dollars," he announced.

Valerie feigned indignation. "Thirty dollars before we see the portraits? You must be afraid we'll be so horrified by your evil revelations that we'll run off without paying."

She pulled out three ten-dollar bills. "We can take it, girls, can't we?" she asked.

Neither of us answered. The artist stuffed the money into his jeans and Valerie headed for the pictures. She turned each one over. When she spun around, her face was contorted with anger and she strode over to the young man.

"What is this game you're playing? Do you take us for fools?"

He didn't answer. While Valerie continued her verbal assault, I picked up the sketches. I was stunned. Valerie looked like a middle-aged cherub, absolutely beatific. I looked unlike a penurious widow. My face was aristocratic. And Martha looked like a movie starlet. All her beautiful features were accurately copied. The sketches were flattering. And they were without sin.

Valerie felt she had been cheated by the Sin Painter. Before descending, she stalked over to the easel and knocked it down. The artist handed me the three portraits.

Valerie marched straight to the door. She didn't stop until she reached the board to cross to the car.

"I'm sorry for this cheap come-on," she said. "I'd like to rip that sign down."

She walked off the board and sloshed through the mud to the sign that still rocked in the wind. Suddenly she laughed. I was worried about the mood change.

"Come here," she called.

Martha declined. I struggled through mud oozing over my ankles. I looked at the spot on the sign that Valerie's finger pointed to. Above and between the "i" and the "n" in the word Sin was a small "g" which seemed to have been put there as an afterthought. It was painted in light pink while the other letters were in black. What it really said was Sign Painting. From the road we couldn't see

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the "g," and neither had Howard or John noticed it.

After dropping Martha off, Valerie talked on about how we'd been hoaxed.

"You see, it was a joke. No sign painter worth his salt would leave out a letter, but this one did it to attract attention. Our taciturn artist has a sense of humor. He mocked his craft on the very sign he painted."

"But why didn't he tell us," I interjected, "that it was an intentional mistake?"

"Oh, I guess most people see the real spelling when they get close to the door. We missed it because of the rain. When we got to the loft, we went right to the portrait section. We ignored the tavern signs which could be called sign painting. Oh, all these signs! It's so confusing. But you do understand?"

"No, I don't," I told her.

Valerie laughed. "Our young man does portraits, figureheads, and tavern signs. Each of them is in a different spot in the loft. We happened to settle right at the portrait part, and he assumed that's what we wanted. He must have thought all my chatter about sin painting was just so much aimless talk about the joke sign outside."

"You're probably right," I said, "but I think he knew the reason we came."

"Why, dear?" Valerie asked.

"Because he seemed uncomfortable about the whole thing."

"I think he was simply an opportunist who didn't want to lose a sale," she said.

When I got home, I took my rolled-up portrait and slid it into the coffee table drawer. I had had enough of the Crafts Barn and of Valerie. The day had been disturbing. I needed a cup of hot cocoa and a nap.

The phone riddled my sleep. Martha was choking out words I couldn't quite make out and coming over to see me right away. I had a brandy poured by the time she arrived. She didn't want it. Her hand was shaking as she unfurled her portrait.

She put it down on the coffee table and ran her finger over the ruffled collar of the blouse she had on when she posed.

"Look at the collar," she sobbed.

I looked and saw nothing. She grabbed my hand and ran my index finger over the outline of the ruffles. Then I saw it. In darker strokes, almost blended into the contours of the collar, was scripted the word *Adultery*.

Martha reached for the brandy. "Valerie, sweet forgiving Valerie. She put on a good scene for our benefit. She had

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all this prearranged. After John told her about the Sin Painter, she called him and hired him to do this to me. I knew she wanted to punish me for the affair with John."

I let her sip her brandy. "I can't believe she would be that cruel to you," I told her.

"Then let's compare pictures," Martha cried. "You'll see that yours is sinless."

I opened the drawer and smoothed out my portrait. Martha gasped. She pointed at my barrette which is engraved with my name, Ellen. I squinted at it and saw the *E* clearly drawn, and then I saw the *nvy* that followed. My barrette said *Envy*.

It's disconcerting to see your prime sin staring at you. When it's disclosed so openly, the only thing to do is confess.

"It's true," I told Martha. "I do envy, and I'm not proud of it. I envy your beauty and your wealth, and I envy Valerie her vitality and her wealth. I hope you'll forgive me."

"Please," she said, "there's nothing to forgive. I thought Valerie hated only me. I didn't realize she was so sick she'd lash out at you, too."

"Let's burn these things," I suggested.

"No," Martha said, "get your coat."

In a few minutes Valerie, John, Martha, and I stood around Valerie's dining-room table. Martha was in command.

"I'm here to put an end to this cheap charade. There's no sense in pretending we can be friends. John, we've done irreparable damage to Valerie, and she simply can't forget it."

With that she opened up the portraits and indicated the sins. Valerie gasped and John swore softly.

"Our friendship is over," Martha said, "and as for the business—well, John and Howard can decide about that."

She started to leave but Valerie caught her.

"Please," she begged, "I didn't do this. There's some evil force at work. That young man did this on his own."

Martha pulled away.

"Let me get my portrait," Valerie pleaded. "He must have written something on mine, too."

She ran to the library and came back with a rolled-up sheet, a sad diploma of our transgressions. We all studied it and John saw it first. He pointed to the outline of the curls piled high on Valerie's head. We followed his finger as he traced the letters *V-e-n-g-e-a-n-c-e*.

Valerie, struck dumb, sank back on a chair.

Martha took to her bed

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shortly after. She was convinced Valerie had wanted her to see the word vengeance so that she would be eternally afraid of her. She was certain Valerie intended to kill her.

John and Howard retained the business out of economic necessity, but they stopped being friends. Howard believed Valerie had devised the painting scheme to destroy Martha, and he further despised Valerie for bringing my failing into it. John stood by Valerie. He too thought the young man had uncanny perception. He tried to locate him but the Crafts Barn told him the artist had left for another part of the state. They had no forwarding address.

My own theory was that the young man had played a cruel joke, in the same vein as his sign. Valerie's harping on sins had annoyed him. He studied us and had made lucky guesses on our weaknesses.

I did wish I could tell him how his cruel prank ultimately led to Martha's death. Valerie couldn't bear Martha's withdrawal and wanted to be reconciled. She brought flowers one day and brushed past the housekeeper. When Martha saw Valerie, she ran from the room to the staircase, stumbled, and fell down the whole flight. Her body lay broken at the foot of the stairs.

In his grief Howard turned to me. We began seeing each other regularly. Neither of us ever talked about Martha or Valerie until today, as we were strolling on the boardwalk in Cape May. An artist was doing portraits. For a moment I thought it was the same young man, but this one was clean-shaven. I was about to mention it when he said, "Like to have your picture done, Mister?"

Howard shook his head. Then the artist offered him a reduced rate. Howard didn't want to appear cheap, so he consented. When the portrait was finished, the artist handed it to me.

It was quite good. In fact, it was too good. And the final piece of the puzzle fell into place.

When I confronted Howard, he admitted that the beardless painter on the boardwalk and the young man at the Crafts Barn were the same person. He was afraid of arousing my suspicions if he continued resisting the portrait. He hoped to get the painting before I could check it over.

He got off cheaply this time. When he went back to the Crafts Barn after he and John had seen Sin Painting, he paid the artist $300 to do the portraits of the three women who would come in. He described

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each of us, and named our sins.

Knowing Martha's vanity, he was sure she'd examine the picture carefully and discover *Adultery*. He had *Envy* drawn into mine to make me conscious of it, hoping I'd rid myself of the flaw. He thought I was a cut above Valerie and Martha, and had no reason to be jealous of them. He knew how terrified Martha was of Valerie and was sure *Vengeance* would unhinge her mind.

And Valerie, poor Valerie—she really did forgive and forget. It was the injured husband who could do neither. . .

I am sitting alone on the bench now. I cannot fault the Sin Painter for his part in this. After all, it was he who kept me from pursuing my relationship with Howard. When I studied the portrait of Howard, my eye had been drawn to the paisley design on his tie, and my finger had traced the word *Hate*.

"Q"

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We are grateful to two readers of EQMM for supplying the text of a story about John Donne, the famous poet and divine. The 1855 version below, from "The National Magazine," was sent in by W. Robert Gibson of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. An earlier version of the story, from a bound volume of "Western Miscellany" for the years 1848-9, was submitted by Phillip D. Hiestand of Indianapolis, Indiana. We were happy to send a finder's fee to both readers . . .

DR. DONNE DETECTS;

or, A Skull That Had a Tongue

When Dr. John Donne, the famous poet and divine of the reign of James I, attained possession of his first living, he took a walk in the churchyard, where the sexton was at the time digging a grave, and in the course of his labor threw up a skull.

This skull the doctor took into his hands and found a rusty headless nail sticking in the temple of it, which he drew out secretly, and wrapped it in the corner of his handkerchief. He then demanded of the grave-digger whether he knew whose skull that was.

He said it was a man's who kept a brandy-shop; an honest, drunken fellow, who one night having taken two quarts, was found dead in his bed next morning.

"Had he a wife?"

"Yes."

"What character does she bear?"

"A very good one: only the neighbors reflect on her because she married the day after her husband was buried."

This was enough for the doctor, who, under the pretense of visiting his parishioners, called on the woman: he asked her several questions, and among others what sickness her husband died of.

She giving him the same account he had before received, he suddenly opened the handkerchief, and cried in an authoritative voice, "Woman, do you know this nail?" She was struck with horror at the unexpected demand, instantly owned the fact, and was brought to trial and executed.

Truly might one say, with even more point than Hamlet, that the skull had a tongue in it.

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a haunting little tale by

GERALD KERSH

The brutal double murder had occurred at Number 14 (now 13B) Tulip Crescent twenty years ago or more. There had not been a single clue—"it was one of those cases in which Scotland Yard was baffled, completely baffled"...

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

by GERALD KERSH

The little man with the little black bag turned to the right at The Bricklayers, walked on, and turned right again at St. George's Church. Then he found that he was lost. Someone had misdirected him, or he had misinterpreted the directions.

He stood in a small curved street of cheap and pretentious houses with plaster columns and basements fenced in with massive, spear-headed iron railings. The snow, trampled to slush in the main road, lay here like a sheepskin rug. Something like a pancake of yellow light lay under every lamppost. The little man with the little black bag was aware, of a certain uneasiness.

Then he saw the policeman. The policeman was standing in the penumbra beyond one of the circles of light. The top of his helmet bobbed seven feet above the snow. He was enormous in his heavy great-coat. The little man with the little black bag approached, with a certain trepidation, and said, "I beg pardon, but I seem to have lost my way. Can you tell me how to get to Mahogany Road?"

The policeman replied, "Mahogany Road, sir? Yes, sir. Let me see now, Mahogany Road. This is Tulip Crescent. Follow the Crescent around to your left, just as you're going, then bear right along Jade Street, and when you get to a pub called The Jolly Farmers, turn sharp right and there you are."

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The little man with the little black bag said, "Did you say Tulip Crescent? Now where have I heard Tulip Crescent mentioned before?"

The policeman said, "I daresay you would have heard of it in connection with the Joyce Murder."

"Oh, yes, yes, the Joyce Murder, Tulip Crescent. Of course," said the other uneasily. "Somewhat before my time, I believe."

"I daresay it would be," said the policeman, "but I remember it."

"It happened at Number Fourteen, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, at Number Fourteen. But after the scandal they changed the number of the house—it's now Thirteen B. Yes, sir, if you want to get to Mahogany Road, follow the Crescent around to your left, then bear right along Jade Street, and when you get to The Jolly Farmers, turn sharp right and there you are."

The little man with the little black bag walked on, and the policeman walked with him. From time to time the policeman flashed his lamp into a doorway. Once he tried a lock.

"Live near here?" he asked.

The other replied, "No, I live in Australia, in Sydney—near Sydney, at least. Not far from Sydney. I daresay you wonder what brings me here. Well, as a matter of fact, it *is* rather extraordinary but I have to go to Mahogany Road to meet a distant relation of mine whom I have never met before. It's a family affair. And so *this* is Tulip Crescent?"

The policeman said, with something like relish, "This is Tulip Crescent."

He turned and threw the beam of his light on the door of a house.

The little man with the little black bag saw 13B in brass against green paint in a halo of dried-up metal polish. "It was before my time," he said.

The policeman eased his knees and beat his gloved hands together, and said, "It was quite a case, sir, as you may have read."

"An old lady and an old gentleman were murdered, I believe, and no one found out who did it," said the stranger.

"That's right, and after twenty years the murderer is still undiscovered," said the policeman.

"It means that he is still at large," said the little man with the little black bag. "Still at large."

The policeman cleared his throat judicially and said, "At least he has never been brought to court. You understand, sir,

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that this is my beat and I know a good deal about it. It is my business to know what goes on, and what has gone on, sir, on my beat."

"But this was twenty years ago or more."

"Yes, sir, but we have our proper professional interest in these things. I am only an ordinary police constable, as you see. But these things are interesting. And if, as I might say, I walk up and down past Number Fourteen—or, I should say, Thirteen B—many times a night, it is only natural for me to take an interest. Do you know the facts of the case?"

The little man with the little black bag, shifting from foot to foot and looking nervously up and down the deserted Crescent, said, "An old lady and her brother were murdered for their money, and the murderer got away scot-free—that's all I know. And now if you'll excuse me—"

The policeman, still beating away the cold with his gloved hands, said, "It was an interesting case, sir. Mr. Spoon of the *Sunday Special* wrote very intelligently about it in his series of 'Unsolved Murder Mysteries.' There was this Miss Joyce and her brother, Mr. Joyce. They lived in what was then Number Fourteen, you see, sir. The Joyces were people of independent means. But I daresay you've read all about it in 'Unsolved Murder Mysteries,' by the gentleman whose name I have already mentioned."

"No, no."

"The father was an actuary, whatever that may be, sir."

"I believe it is a man who guesses the odds in insurance, officer."

"I see you're a betting man, sir," said the policeman.

"No, no, not at all," said the little man with the little black bag. "I never bet."

The policeman continued, "Their father was an actuary, and he left the lady, Miss Joyce, a considerable sum of money. Her brother, Mr. Joyce, was, if I may say so, sir, a briefless barrister, who liked his bottle and got around to living on his sister—if you get what I mean, sir."

"Yes, I do."

"You understand, of course, that I have studied all this pretty closely, sir, this being my beat."

"Naturally."

"The old lady—she was a few years older than her brother—didn't trust banks and kept most of her money, or at least a good deal of it, in the house. A bad principle," said the policeman. "For my part, give me a bank."

"Give me a bank," said the

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little man with the little black bag.

"Well, sir, the inevitable, as they say in the newspapers, is bound to happen. One dark night there was a murder," said the policeman with gusto, "a murder of almost unprecedented brutality. The criminal went into Number Fourteen, as it was then, murdered the old lady, murdered the old gentleman, and ran off with every farthing he could lay his hands on. It amounted to something like six hundred and twenty-five pounds, six shillings, and threepence."

The other said, "Where was the policeman on duty here, at that time?"

The policeman replied, "This was over twenty years ago, sir, and things were a little looser than they are at the present time. True, your police constable had to account for his movements, but there was not quite the rigid checkup then that you get now. Your sergeants came round, of course. But the policeman who was on duty here at the time of the Joyce Murder had the whole Crescent to cover and this Crescent makes a considerable bend, as you'll see by the time you get to Mahogany Road.

"The man who killed Miss Joyce and her brother must have watched the movements of the policeman on the beat. You know that we are usually at a certain place at a certain time. The whole thing was done in a few minutes. A few minutes? One minute—two minutes at the most. The culprit had means of entry to the house, went in, did his work, and came out shutting the door behind him.

"The police should not have discovered the fact for days, perhaps, if the old gentleman—I mean Miss Joyce's brother—had not managed to drag himself to the front door before he died. How he managed to do it nobody knows. His skull was smashed in.

"It was a horrible affair as you may well imagine, and that is why they changed the number of the house. Then, of course, there was no housing shortage, and people preferred not to live in a place where such things had happened. And so, as the gentleman said in the newspaper, it remains an unsolved mystery to this day."

The little man with the little black bag said, "Were there no clues?"

The policeman replied, "Not one. It happened about ten o'clock one night in September. If it had been wet, there might have been footprints. It was one of those dry dusty nights, with

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a bit of a breeze blowing. The officer on duty observed that this crime had been committed because, in the first place, he saw that the door of Number Fourteen was shut. In the second place—"

"Did you say *because* it was shut?" asked the little man with the little black bag.

"Yes, sir. He was accustomed to hear from Mr. and Miss Joyce at about that time. The old gentleman was not afraid of anything. He was a lawyer. But the old lady, who kept the purse strings, she liked to be friendly with the police and, therefore, she made a point of giving the officer on duty a cake or a pie or a sandwich—sometimes a glass of rum—late in the evening.

"For the first time in seven years there was silence in Number Fourteen. The officer on duty stopped at the door of Fourteen, flashing his lamp about and wondering what was wrong. Then all of a sudden he saw a red blob creeping out under the front door. He knocked, and when nobody answered he rammed his shoulder against the door and nearly fell inside because the door was not *quite* shut. Then he saw poor old Mr. Joyce with his head bashed in on the doormat."

The stranger said, "And there was an end of the matter?"

The policeman nodded. "There was the end of the matter. Nobody found anything. There was no evidence—not a tittle. They questioned Miss Joyce's nephew but he was paralyzed and had been in bed for the past three years, so *he* was out of the question. It was one of those cases in which Scotland Yard was baffled, completely baffled. The murderer was never caught."

The little man with the little black bag glanced uneasily from left to right and said, "Do you believe that criminals—I mean murderers—feel, as they say, compelled to come back to the scene of the crime?"

"Some do, and some do not," said the policeman pompously.

The stranger said, "I can understand that a man might want to come back. I can't think what for, but I can imagine a sort of nervous compulsion. I can simply *imagine* it, mind you."

The policeman said, "You're living in Mahogany Road?"

The stranger said, "Which reminds me that I must be getting along. Oh, by the way, what happened to the officer on duty at that time?"

The policeman said, "He was dismissed, sir. He used to go

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into the doorway of Number One Hundred to have a smoke. On the night of the murder it seems he had more than one smoke. He failed in his duty, sir."

"So the criminal was never found."

"Never found, sir, not a trace. But what you were saying about murderers coming back, sir. It really does happen sometimes."

"I daresay," said the little man with the little black bag.

"Were there no fingerprints? None at all?"

"The murderer was wearing—"

The policeman looked down at his gloved hands.

"The policeman could have done it," said the stranger.

"He did," said the policeman.

Then the little man with the little black bag found himself alone in the Crescent, and there were no footprints in the snow except his own.

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a *NEW* Photographer story by

JAMES HOLDING

Manuel Andradas had two fields of expertise. He was a professional photographer and he was a professional assassin. A fastidious man, especially with words, Manuel did not think of himself as a murderer. That term was too harsh, too crude, too brutal. Rather, he looked upon himself as a Nullifier—a freelance who accepted businesslike assignments from The Corporation, The Big Ones (they too were fastidious in their choice of names—never anything as indelicate as The Mob or even The Syndicate).

And now to the tale of The Photographer and the Jockey. . .and if there's a jockey, can a horse race be far behind? Actually, it was a two-horse race—between Money and Murder. Place your bet—but if there's a photographer, can a photo finish be far behind?

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE JOCKEY

by JAMES HOLDING

With his camera case on the floor beside him, Manuel Andradas, known in Rio de Janeiro as The Photographer, sat at a corner table in an open-air cafe below the towering figure of Christ the Redeemer on Corcovado. He sipped beer while waiting for Rodolfo. He would have preferred a glass of cashew juice—he considered it soothing to the nerves—but cashew juice was unavailable at the cafe.

Rodolfo had made the rendezvous with Manuel by telephone the evening before. Manuel had been quite pleased, in his peculiarly unemotional way, to hear from Rodolfo. Six weeks had elapsed since his last assignment. And Manuel needed

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money. At least, he thought he did.

A new, miraculously complicated color camera had caught his eye; he wished to buy it. It did not occur to him to use a bit of his accumulated capital to make the purchase although, in fact, he possessed a tidy fortune, earned in pursuit of his second profession. For Manuel was so fond of money that it was an actual physical wrench for him to part with any of it: unless, that is, it was what he termed "new money"—cruzeiros earned so recently that he had not yet added them to his permanent collection, as it were.

Rodolfo came onto the cafe terrace, his ape arms swinging, his prognathous jaw jutting. He spotted Manuel and walked to his isolated table with a word of greeting.

"Sit down," said Manuel politely. "Will you have a beer?"

Rodolfo took the other chair at the table. "A *cafezinho*," he said.

Manuel motioned to a waitress. While she was securing Rodolfo's coffee from the bar, Manuel murmured, "Where is it this time, Rodolfo?" His last assignment had sent him, somewhat uncomfortably, to Bahia aboard a coastwise freighter loaded with stinking hides and castor beans.

Rodolfo's lips lifted in the grimace that was his smile. "Right here in Rio, Photographer," he replied.

"Good." Manuel took a sip of beer. "Not a child this time, I hope. I grow sensitive, Rodolfo."

Rodolfo's coffee came, black and steaming. "You, sensitive!" he began, laughing sarcastically until he looked across the table into Manuel's muddy-brown eyes. Then he stopped laughing abruptly and said, "It's a man, don't worry. But a man who is still, in one respect, a child."

"Retarded?" The Photographer made a moue of distaste.

Rodolfo shook his head. "A jockey," he said.

Manuel permitted himself a half smile. "Very funny. His name and address?"

"Here." With a prestidigitator's gesture Rodolfo slipped a small white card into Manuel's hand. There was a name written on it in pencil, an address underneath.

Manuel glanced at the card and sucked in his breath. "This one I have photographed for *Rio Illustrated*," he said, pleased. "I am known to him already."

"That should simplify your job," said Rodolfo.

Manuel ignored the hint of a

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sneer in the other's voice, and asked eagerly, "How much?"

"Fifty thousand."

"What! To nullify the most famous jockey in Brazil? The Whip?" Manuel was shocked. "You insult me, Rodolfo!"

"Fifty thousand. No more."

"That is a fair price for a minor businessman, a politician of the fourth rank, a troublesome relative!" Manuel spread his hands in an eloquent gesture of protest. "This man is worth far more than fifty thousand—a quarter million at the very least!"

"Fifty thousand," Rodolfo repeated impassively.

Manuel's lips tightened. Anger burned in him. Yet he said only, "Is there a time limit?"

"Before Sunday," Rodolfo replied. "You understand?"

Manuel nodded his comprehension. On Sunday the annual horse race known as the Grande Premio Brasil would draw everybody who was anybody in Rio to the Jockey Club to witness this most glittering of August sporting events. And the jockey whose name Manuel had read but a moment before on Rodolfo's little white card would be riding the favorite.

Manuel said, "Very well, then. The usual arrangement?"

"A third now. The rest when you show me proof."

They stood and shook hands as an excuse for Rodolfo to leave in Manuel's palm a packet of banknotes.

When Rodolfo left the cafe, Manuel sat down again and thriftily finished his beer, nursing his indignation at the niggardliness of The Corporation.

The jockey, Paulo Pereira, lived on the top floor of one of Rio's luxurious new apartment houses which was imaginatively set up on stilts between the green of the mountains and the aquamarine of the sea in the waterside suburb of Leblon.

At four in the afternoon, when he knocked on the jockey's door, no one answered Manuel's summons. So he retired to a shady corner of the carport under the building to await his victim's return. He did not wish to waste a single unnecessary hour in carrying out his shoddy cut-price assignment from The Big Ones.

He almost wished he had refused the commission entirely, so indignant was he at the minuscule sum, the mere *pitança*, they were paying him to dispose of Paulo Pereira; known to the sporting world as The Whip because of his invariable habit of going to the whip in the stretch—whether his mount was leading the pack

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already or dead last—and pretending to belabor his poor beast unmercifully while actually never touching whip to hide. By this merciful magic The Whip had brought home more than a hundred winners and become the most successful jockey in Brazil.

Manuel waited. The cocktail hour arrived and passed, the dinner hour followed, darkness fell over Leblon, and lights winked on in the apartments over Manuel's head. The jockey did not return. Manuel used the time of waiting to think very carefully about his assignment. As a result, when Paulo Pereira did at length appear—a very small man driving a very big North American car—Manuel had discarded his original straightforward murder plan for something considerably more subtle.

The jockey's huge car slid quietly between the stilts supporting the apartment building and came to a cushioned halt in the parking space marked "Pereira." The headlights went out. Manuel was relieved to see that the jockey was alone in the car. Paulo Pereira stepped from the driver's seat and Manuel Andradas, materializing in the semigloom beside him, spoke quietly. "Senhor Pereira," he said. "Do you remember me? I am Manuel Andradas, the photographer who took your picture for *Rio Illustrated* several months ago."

The jockey tilted his head to look up at Manuel's face, then smiled cordially. "Certainly," he said. "And damned good pictures you took of me, too! You made me look almost of normal size." He laughed self-consciously with the air of a man who deplores his meager stature. "What's on your mind tonight, Senhor Andradas?"

Manuel answered, "In a purely accidental manner I happened to overhear something today that concerns you very closely. You are in great danger, Senhor Pereira."

In the dim light of the garage Manuel thought the little man's expression was more of contemptuous impatience than of startled surprise. "What kind of danger?" he demanded brusquely.

"We can't talk here."

Paulo shrugged his narrow shoulders. "Come up to my apartment, then."

Manuel said, "If I am seen with you tonight, or known to have visited your apartment, or, indeed, even suspected of having exchanged a single word with you, I would find *myself* in great danger also. Naturally, I wish to protect myself. Yet I feel I should warn you, too."

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He paused. "I suggest my studio as a place where we can be quite safe from observation, Senhor."

"Well," Pereira said, giving The Photographer a level look. "I guess I'll agree to that, since you think it so important."

Manuel felt his spirits lift. "Good. My car is parked there in that guest space. Shall we go?"

They entered Manuel's eight-year-old station wagon and drove in silence to his studio just off Rua Ouvidor in the center of downtown Rio. "Kindly keep down in your seat, Senhor," Manuel requested with well-simulated nervousness.

The jockey complied, slouching in his seat until only the top of his head could possibly have been visible from the black and white mosaic sidewalks as they passed. He seemed to be amused rather than apprehensive at the precaution.

Manuel approached his studio from the narrow alley that ran behind it. Parking his old car in its usual place in the alley, he led the way through the back door of his quarters, through his darkroom, and ultimately into the spacious studio beyond. Here, in complete darkness, he said to Paulo, "Wait," and pulled the heavy draperies across the windows before he switched on lights.

The lights revealed a thoroughly professional workroom, cluttered with cameras, mobile lighting units, reflecting screens, electric cables. Near the doorway that led to Manuel's simple bedroom stood a small circular table and two straight chairs. The Photographer motioned Paulo into one of the chairs and himself sat in the other. As hospitably as his dour nature permitted, he said, "Will you have a glass of wine, Senhor? Or coffee?"

Paulo shook his head. "Nothing, thank you, except an account of what you overheard today that concerns me."

Manuel nodded, leaning forward to deposit his camera case under the table. "I could scarcely believe my ears, to tell you the truth. You know the cafe at the foot of Christo Redentor? I was there today, sitting at a table drinking beer. Behind me, at another table, were two men talking. I must tell you that I have unusually keen hearing and their words reached me clearly."

Paulo, whose feet failed to reach the floor as he sat in the chair, nodded his head to indicate his interest.

"One seemed to be giving the other instructions," said Manuel. "An assignment. Your

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name was mentioned. Paulo Pereira, The Whip. I recognized it immediately, since I had photographed you for *Rio Illustrated*. I eavesdropped quite shamelessly from then on, as you can imagine."

The jockey squirmed uneasily in his chair. "Get to the point, please, Senhor Andradas. What did they say?"

"I gathered that the man receiving instructions was a professional assassin. He was being commissioned to kill you, Senhor Pereira."

"Kill me!" The expression on the jockey's face was no longer one of amusement.

"Yes. In reprisal for some action of yours that I did not hear mentioned specifically between them."

In a low voice Paulo murmured, "Incredible!"

Manuel, considerately, was silent, watching his small visitor woodenly until the jockey went on, "He *looked* like a gangster, I must say. Overdressed and with a hard, menacing, assured manner, you know? Just like the gangsters in North American cinemas."

"Excuse me," said Manuel, "may I know who this overdressed gangster was?"

Paulo shrugged. "A fellow I'd never seen before yesterday, I beg you to believe. A perfect stranger. This man approached me last evening in a restaurant where I was having dinner alone and offered me money to throw the horse race on Sunday. Imagine! The Grande Premio Brasil! I'm riding Wait-a-Bit, the favorite, you know."

"Every Carioca worthy of the name knows that," said Manuel.

"He wanted me to pull Wait-a-Bit in the stretch," said Paulo, "under cover of my well-known whipping routine. Otherwise, I will be killed before the race, he said. I thought the whole performance a practical joke of some kind, frankly. Or an attempt at psychological warfare by a rival stable. Or, most likely of all"—the jockey eyed Manuel calmly—"a sensational publicity stunt to promote the race on Sunday. Tonight, I was convinced that was it when you confronted me in my carport. I thought, quite naturally, that you wanted photos for the press of the threatened jockey; you know, very dramatic, the jockey who refused a bribe to throw the race. Incidentally, I did refuse the bribe. And laughed at the man who threatened me to make me do as he said." There was a curious sort of bantam dignity about Paulo as he uttered these words.

Manuel could not refrain from asking, "How much were

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you offered to pull your horse?"

"A paltry quarter of a million." The jockey was disdainful.

Inwardly Manuel groaned. A paltry quarter of a million, indeed! This from a man no taller than a ten-year-old boy whom Manuel had been hired to nullify for a pitiful fifty thousand! He forced down his anger and said, "You spoke of a rival stable. Would any of the owners with horses entered in the Premio pay a quarter of a million to fix a race in which the purse is only a hundred thousand?"

Paulo nodded at once. "Oh, yes. To owners, the purse and even the betting in the Premio are incidental. It is the fortune to be made in stud fees that makes this race so special. The horse that wins automatically commands enormous fees, once he is retired to stud."

"I see," said Manuel, "the big money comes later."

"Yes. And it oftens runs into the millions."

Manuel thought for a moment. "Which horse is the second favorite in Sunday's race?"

"Scalawag," Paulo said. "Pre-race odds of four to one."

"Who owns Scalawag?"

"A group called The Big Boy Corporation."

"Ah!" said Manuel softly. "The Big Boy Corporation. And how long have they been racing horses in Brazil?"

"A year or two only. They are comparative newcomers. Scalawag is the first horse to carry their colors in the Premio."

"So. Now it becomes clear. My suspicion is confirmed."

"What suspicion?"

"That our Brazilian brotherhood of criminals—The Corporation, The Big Ones, so-called—is behind the attempt to bribe you. And now intends to kill you for refusing their bribe."

The jockey at last looked startled. "You mean The Big Boy Corporation who owns Scalawag is really The Big Ones?"

"I would bet my life on it," Manuel said positively. "And I'll tell you why. After I heard these men talking about your murder today, I turned my head casually to get a glimpse of them. To my horror I recognized one of them. And worse still, he recognized *me*."

"Who was he?"

"A man I know only as Rodolfo. But I am sure of this: he is an important member of The Big Ones. He walks like an ape and has a jaw like one. Would that be your well-dressed gangster?"

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The jockey shook his head. "My man walked like a woman. And had scarcely any jaw at all."

"I had trouble with this man Rodolfo once," Manuel explained, "over an actress friend of his I was photographing. After I knocked him down and humiliated him before her, she told me this Rodolfo was a member of The Corporation. She feared he would have me killed. I hastened to apologise very humbly to him when I found out who he was, you may be sure. And thus I managed to stay alive. In any event, this is the man we are up against, Paulo—Rodolfo, and The Corporation of which he is a member. That is why I was so anxious not to be seen with you tonight. Why I brought you here. Rodolfo may well have suspected that I overheard his talk of murdering you today. You see?"

The jockey, still only half convinced, gave Manuel a quizzical look. "Tell me," he said, "if you go in such fear of these Big Ones, I am surprised you were willing to risk your life tonight to warn me. Why did you do it?"

Manuel said simply, "To find out which horse has the best chance of winning on Sunday if you happen to get killed in the meantime."

The diminutive jockey laughed aloud. "You are frank, at least, Senhor Andradas," he said. "No, you must not bet on Wait-a-Bit unless I ride him! He's never finished better than fourth without me up. There is something mysterious between that horse and me that makes him put forth his maximum effort only for me, do you understand? Without me riding him, he's just another race horse, and a mediocre one, at that. If you follow racing at all, you must know that. It's been widely commented on. The only reason he's favored on Sunday is because I'm riding him."

"And without you he'll be beaten?"

"Soundly. Scalawag will win the race easily. He's very fast at the Premio distance. The rest of the field are born also-rans, in my opinion." Then, as anger overcame him, the jockey went on fiercely, "But I *will* be riding Wait-a-Bit on Sunday! I promise you that! This is no obscure, unknown man whose murder can be planned so blithely! This is Paulo Pereira, Senhor, the premier jockey of Brazil! A man with hosts of friends and patrons! Why, even if I don't call the police, which I intend to do immediately, the owner I ride for, Francisco Almeida, could himself easily provide me

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with airtight security, twenty-four hours a day, until the moment I step into Wait-a-Bit's saddle on Sunday!"

Paulo jumped up from his chair, his small figure stiff with stubborn pride. He looked around the cluttered studio. "Do you have a telephone?"

"Yes," said Manuel. He, too, rose from his chair. "But I am afraid it is too late for you to call the police."

"What do you mean?"

With one foot Manuel snaked his camera case from under the table and pushed it gently across the floor toward the jockey. "Please look in this case, Senhor, and I think you will understand what I mean."

Paulo's brows knit in puzzlement. He eyed Manuel uncomprehendingly for a moment before he bent over, unzipped The Photographer's case, and lifted out its contents. Item by item he deposited on the floor alongside the case a Leica camera, a Minox, an electronic flashpack, a telephoto lens, five rolls of film. And from the very bottom of the case, finally, he brought forth a large pistol with a silencer on its barrel, a delicate, razor-sharp throwing knife shaped like a bougainvillea leaf, and a wire garrote with twisted handles of electrician's tape on each end.

Like a man who has suddenly become unbearably weary, Paulo Pereira straightened his slight frame and looked with sick eyes at Manuel. "You?" he asked in an incredulous voice. It was only a choked whisper.

Manuel said, "I am sorry, Senhor," and like striking snakes his two hands flew across the space between them to seize the jockey's slender throat. The muscles in The Photographer's forearms came up like steel wires under the stuff of his jacket sleeves. The diminutive jockey was lifted bodily off the floor and held suspended in midair while he strangled. To no avail his hands tore at Manuel's hands, his legs and feet thrashed wildly, his body writhed.

When he was dead, Manuel dropped his body on the floor and reached for his Polaroid camera. But before he took his picture of the jockey, he thrust one hand under the table and switched off the tape recorder.

The next day was Friday. Manuel met Rodolfo in an obscure cafe on the Praça Tiradentes.

"So soon?" asked Rodolfo.

Manuel grunted and passed a Polaroid print across the cafe table to Rodolfo. "Here is your proof," he said.

Rodolfo examined the pic-

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ture of Paulo Periera, the eyes bursting from their sockets, the swollen, bitten tongue protruding too far from the open mouth, the limbs sprawled at painful angles like those of a ragdoll.

Rodolfo nodded. "This should serve. It's certainly convincing. I'll have the rest of your money for you tomorrow. On the Sugar Loaf cable car at noon."

"Be sure you do," said Manuel. "I'll need the money before Sunday."

"Sunday?" Rodolfo raised his eyebrows.

"I'm going to bet the whole thing on the Grand Premio Brasil."

Rodolfo gave him a surprised look. "You? You never gamble."

"This time I shall. In the forlorn hope of turning your insulting fee into a respectable sum."

Rodolfo laughed. "If you lose, though, you will have nothing. Have you thought of that? What horse are you going to bet on?"

"The same one you are," said Manuel. He withdrew his gaze from the Joao Caetano Theatre across the square and locked eyes with Rodolfo. Rodolfo was the first to look away. The Photographer made to rise.

"Wait," said Rodolfo. "What did you do with our friend here?" He tapped a finger against the Polaroid print.

"That is nobody's business but mine. It is sufficient for you to know that I have disposed of him where he cannot possibly be found until the day of the race. Do you understand?"

"So there will be no radical change in the odds until the last minute, eh?"

"I am not a dunce," said Manuel, "even if you treat me as one. Goodbye, Rodolfo."

From the Praça Tiradentes Manuel went directly to his studio, checked to be certain the stiff body of Paulo Pereira still lay under his darkroom sink, then picked up his telephone.

His call to the owner of Wait-a-Bit was put through very quickly by Francisco Almeida's butler at the mention of Paulo Pereira's name. "Paulo?" asked Almeida anxiously when he came on the wire, "Why didn't you show up at the stables this morning? Are you ill or hurt? And where are you now? I haven't been able to reach you all day! For God's sake, Paulo, this is no time for you to—" Abruptly he cut off his words. After a pause he said tentatively, "Paulo?"

Manuel, through the hand-

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kerchief he held over the mouth, said, "Paulo is neither ill nor hurt, Senhor. He has been kidnaped."

There was a long moment of stunned silence. Then Almeida yelled "What!" so loudly that Manuel's ear rang.

"Kidnaped. That is what I said. You know the meaning of the word?"

Another pause. Then, "And you, I suppose, you are Paulo's kidnaper? Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. Paulo is quite safe. Ready to ride Wait-a-Bit into the winner's circle for you on Sunday. But only if you first pay me a ransom of a quarter of a million cruzeiros for his release."

"You're mad!"

"I am sane. And in deadly earnest, Senhor. If you wish to win the Grande Premio Brasil, you must believe me."

Senhor Almeida breathed heavily on the other end of the line. "The law does not look lightly on extortion!" he cried fiercely. "I shall set the police on you at once!"

Manuel adopted the reasonable, patient tone of a man arguing with a stubborn child. "This is not extortion, Senhor Almeida. This is plain, old-fashioned kidnaping. I have your jockey. And you must pay to get him back alive if you want to win on Sunday. It is as simple as that."

"You think I am a cretin?" shouted Almeida furiously. "You don't have Paulo! I have met men of your type before. You are merely trying to—"

The Photographer interrupted him. "I *do* have Paulo. Wait. I'll put him on the phone. Will that convince you?"

Silence. Manuel took it for an invitation to proceed. "Listen, then," he said to Almeida. "Here he is." Then, aside, he growled, "He thinks I play games, this owner of yours, Paulo. Tell him the truth."

Manuel switched on the playback beside the telephone and brought the mouthpiece closer to it. From the tape then, spoken into the telephone in Paulo's unmistakable voice, came the words which Manuel had painfully culled from the recording of his conversation with the jockey the evening before.

"This is Paulo Pereira, Senhor Almeida. I beg you to believe this man. If I am to ride Wait-a-Bit on Sunday for you, you must do as he said. But please don't call the police. Otherwise I will be killed."

Almeida tried to interrupt with a question. Manuel came back on the wire smoothly. "Are you satisfied?"

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Almeida answered in a new placatory voice. "Yes. Yes. You promise to release him unharmed? Before Sunday? If I pay you a quarter million?" He spoke of a quarter of a million cruzeiros as though it were nothing. Briefly Manuel was tempted to ask for more, but he resisted.

"You have my word on it," he said solemnly.

"How shall I deliver the money?"

Manuel told him in meticulous detail of the foolproof delivery plan he had concocted in anticipation of this question. "I must warn you, however, Senhor," he finished, "if you go to the police or the press about this, or fail to deliver the money as directed, Paulo, your jockey, will die. Understood?"

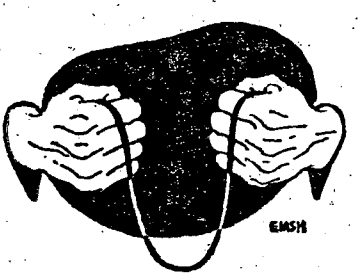
At Almeida's reluctant murmur of "Yes, yes, I understand perfectly," Manuel hung up.

Only one small problem remained: how to dispose safely and permanently of the body in his darkroom. Before addressing himself to its solution, The Photographer went to his tiny refrigerator, took from it a pitcher of cashew juice, and poured himself a glass of the thick sweet liquid. Today it would not only soothe his nerves, he told himself, but would serve as a drink of celebration as well.

For his nullification of Paulo Pereira, which had at first seemed so financially unpromising, was going to prove quite profitable for him after all.

Especially if Scalawag won the Grande Premio Brasil on Sunday.

Which Scalawag certainly would do. Because Manuel himself had arranged it.



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a *NEW* short story by

HENRY SLESAR

Olin Mearns never forgot a face or a name. He knew the Capitals of the World, all the Vice-Presidents, how many years Ty Cobb hit over .300, the average yearly rainfall in Venezuela—you name it, Olin knew it. And then, at the lowest point in his mnemonic career, a shifty-eyed man with a scar on his chin enrolled in Olin's memory course. . .

THE MEMORY EXPERT

by HENRY SLESAR

Olin Mearns sat alone in the makeshift classroom above the El Greco Restaurant and buried his face in his hands. He knew he would never forget this day. But that wasn't unusual. Olin's profession was remembering things and instructing others in that serviceable art. He was a Memory teacher, and in good times his class in the Britt Building on 42nd Street numbered between 20 and 30 students a semester. He could put a name to every face in less than ten minutes after the course began, a feat which never failed to impress his pupils.

Of course, the trick was much easier to perform these days, since Olin's classes never boasted more than five or six students, a practical reality that had forced him to abandon his 42nd Street address for smaller quarters above the Greek restaurant downtown. (The most memorable thing about his course was the smell of burning olive oil.) One of those few students had been Penelope Walz, the cause of his current misery. She had just turned 24 (today) and had a face that Olin couldn't forget even if he tried. She had an hourglass figure, although perhaps a little plump around the six o'clock mark. She also had a mind like a sieve.

It was this latter feature that had attracted Penelope to the small advertisement Olin ran regularly in the *Daily News:*

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"Never forget another face! Never forget another name! Never forget another fact that may be vital to your business or social success! In just four short weeks Olin Mearns, Ph.D., will help you develop a Perfect Memory!"

Only that morning Penelope's imperfect memory had cost her the fourth secretarial job that year. She worked for a lawyer named Nerdlinger, but rarely remembered his name. That day Mr. Nerdlinger himself had walked into the office and Penelope had said, "May I help you?" She had been there four months. When she left she even forgot to take her salary check.

The truth is, Olin had failed to do much for Penelope's mnemonic powers. Their encounter was memorable for a different reason. Olin had fallen passionately, hopelessly in love for the first time in his 49 years. Penelope was flattered enough to respond, despite the difference in their ages, the sparseness of Olin's physique, and the fact that his hair was only a memory. It was his brain that impressed her, that vast storehouse of facts that reposed inside his naked dome.

But there was something very different about Penelope's attitude when he arrived with her birthday gift that afternoon.

"What's wrong, sweetness?" Olin said. "Don't you like the roses?"

"Half a dozen," Penelope said sourly. "Imagine bringing anybody half a dozen roses!"

"Sugar, I told you that I have to cut expenses."

"*You* have to cut!" Penelope cried. "What about me? Do you know they're raising the rent on this apartment by thirty dollars a month? Do you know how much money I owe the grocery store? What about that loan you were going to make me?"

Olin swallowed hard, wishing there were things Penelope *didn't* remember.

"Honey, sweetheart, you know how rough business has been lately. I haven't enrolled *one* student yet this term—"

"And the ring you were going to buy me?" she accused. "Whatever happened to *that?* Honestly, Olin, for a memory teacher you have a very short memory sometimes!"

"Sweetness, I'm waiting until things pick up. It's the economy, people think education is a luxury these days—"

"I don't know about luxuries," Penelope said icily. "All I know is that I'm not getting any younger. And that's why I've decided to take that job whosit offered me, with the whatsit company."

Olin gasped. "Honey, baby,

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you don't mean that job in Alaska? What do you want to freeze up there for?"

"Whosit said it isn't really cold, not in you-know—"

"Juneau," Olin said. He tried to put his arm around the middle of the hourglass and winced when she pushed him away.

"I'm sorry," Penelope said firmly. "A girl has to think of her future, Olin, and you don't seem to have any."

Sitting alone now in the empty classroom, Olin heard an echo of that statement in his head. It became part of his memory bank, along with the Capitals of the World, the Hall of Fame Pitching and Batting Records, and all the other facts that now seemed useless and trivial to him.

When the doorbell sounded, he wasn't stirred into action until the third ring. But habit was stronger than sorrow, and when he opened the door and saw the face of the man outside, he took a mental photograph of his features. The beetling brows, the square chin cleft unnaturally by a scar, the thin lips, the yellowish eyes, shifty with suspicion. And with the same sense of triumph he always felt on these occasions, Olin Mearns realized he could actually put a name to this stranger's face. He wasn't quite sure why, but he knew his name was Morgan Krebs.

"Mike Kingston," the man said, baffling Olin. "I called you this morning, Mr. Mearns, remember?"

"Oh," Olin said. "Oh, yes, of course, Mr. — Kingston. Please come in."

The man entered and seemed relieved to have the door shut behind him.

"I read your ad," he said. "About the Memory course?"

"Ah," Olin answered vaguely, still puzzled by the mystery. He never forgot a face, or the name that went with it. Was he losing his grip, in addition to his girl and his career? But then, as Kingston refused the chair he was offered and wandered toward the window, Olin had the answer. Kingston was using an alias, and no wonder. The name "Morgan Krebs" had appeared under a picture of his face (two views) on Wanted posters and in newspaper stories.

"The thing is," Kingston was saying, "I don't want to take the whole course. I don't have the time, you know?"

"Well—er, what did you have in mind then?" Olin asked.

"What I really need is to remember just one thing," Kingston said. He glanced sideways out of the window toward the street. Whether he

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thought he was being followed or it was simply force of habit, Olin couldn't tell.

"Just one thing," Olin repeated. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Understand? I forgot something, and I haven't been able to remember it since, and it bothers me. I mean, like it bothers me a lot. I figured a guy who knows about Memory, he ought to know how to make me remember. Am I wrong or what?"

The man made Olin nervous, but he was the closest thing to a live pupil Olin had seen in weeks.

"Well," he said carefully, "I'm not sure you understand my course, Mr. Krebston."

"Kingston."

"Kingston, yes. You see, what I do is teach people how to develop their memories, how to use the processes of association, correlation, assimilation." The man's face was like a blank white sheet. Olin finished lamely, "Maybe if you told me more about this. . ."

"All right," Krebs said. "You see, a couple of days ago I stored some, er, personal belongings in one of them new lockers in the railway station, you know? One of the lockers that works without a key. It's one of them combination-lock lockers, you know?"

Olin nodded, fascinated by the man's nervous manner and his shifting eyes.

"Well, that was a dumb thing, you know, on account of I went and forgot the number. I mean, I had a ticket with the locker number and the combination, but I lost it when things got hot. The weather, I mean," he said quickly. "I mean, changing into a summer suit, you know?" Olin was still nodding. "I keep trying to remember them numbers, I mean, I'm going crazy trying to remember them, it's important. You see?"

Olin said, "Well, perhaps if you spoke to someone, an official of the railroad, or the company that makes the lockers—"

"Forget it," Kingston said flatly, ignoring Olin's profession. "That's one thing I can't do, never mind why. I got to remember them numbers, and I got to get them, er, personal belongings out of the locker. So what I want you to do, Professor, is help me remember it, dig?"

Olin dug only too well. Obviously Mr. Morgan Krebs placed quite a value on the, er, personal belongings.

"Well, it's unusual," he said. "I mean, I'm not sure that my particular techniques can *prod* memory as well as improve it."

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Krebs, who had his hand on the window shade, flapped it with an impatient gesture.

"Can you help me or not?"

"I might, I might," Olin said hastily. "I mean, the basic principles should be the same. But I'm not sure I can succeed."

"I'll pay you whether it works or not," Krebs said. "Either way I'll pay you the full price of your course. That's a hundred and fifty bucks, right?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'll pay you a big one and a half, just for trying. And if you make me remember them numbers, Professor, there'll be a bonus in it for you. I mean, a real nice bonus."

Olin seemed to be considering the proposition. Actually he had already agreed to say yes.

"Yes," he said finally. "All I can do is try."

He told Krebs to return the next morning, when the private tutoring would begin.

The moment his new pupil left, Olin dived for the telephone.

"Penelope?" he said. "I've got to see you. There's something I have to tell you."

"The names of all the Presidents and Vice-Presidents? I'm not interested, thank you."

"You don't understand. Something has happened that may be very important—"

"I'm going to bed," Penelope told him. "I've got to get up early. I'm meeting Mr. Whosit about the whatchamacallit. The job. In Alaska."

"Just give me a little time," he pleaded. "Just a few more days."

"Forget about me," she said. "I've already forgotten about you, Harlan."

"Olin," he said miserably, and heard the hanging-up click in the receiver.

When Krebs arrived the next morning, promptly at the appointed time, he didn't seem aware of the fact that his instructor had slept only two hours the night before, spending the rest of his normal sleeping time scanning books, most of which he had already committed to memory. But Olin had failed to find any foolproof system for dredging up already forgotten facts.

He'd just have to wing it.

"We'll try the technique called association," he told his pupil. "Every memory has association with other memories, and if we can put one together with the other—"

"Whatever you say, Professor."

"Try to tell me what you were doing on the day you put this, er, personal property into the locker."

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"I don't remember."

"Do you recall what you were *thinking* when you put this, er, property away?"

"Never mind what I was thinking," Krebs said coldly. "Just tell me how to remember them numbers."

"All right. Shut your eyes and visualize yourself placing the, er, property in the locker." Kingston closed his eyes. "What do you see?"

"Nothing. It's too dark."

"Can you see the shape of the, er, thing you're placing in the locker?"

"Yeah, I remember the shape of it. It's a little black suitc—" His eyes flew open. "Never mind the shape of it, Professor. I know the shape of it. What I want to know is, *where* is it?"

"Can you recall even *one* of the digits?"

"What's a digit?"

"Can you remember even *one* of the numbers? A zero, one, two, three, or four?"

"Yeah," Kingston said.

"Which one, which one?" Olin said excitedly. "Can you remember which of those it was?"

"It was either a zero, a one, a two, a three, or a four. Only I don't remember whether it came first, second, third, or last."

Olin leaned back with a sigh.

That night he telephoned Penelope again.

She said, "Whom did you say is calling?"

The next day, Olin told his pupil, "Today we're going to try a word association test. Although I guess I mean a number association test."

Without much hope for success he began reading off a long list of four-digit combinations. To each of them Kingston either grunted "No" or merely shrugged. Eventually, after two hours of this, the student grew so tired he stretched out on Olin's sofa and shut his eyes.

"9918," Olin said, his voice hoarse.

Kingston didn't reply. He was asleep.

That night, instead of phoning Penelope, he went to her apartment. He found her in the midst of packing.

"Go away, Nolan," she said. "I'm leaving this weekend. Mr. Hammerschmidt is picking me up Saturday morning."

"Who?" Olin said, feeling a pang of jealousy at hearing the name of her new employer for the first time.

"Mr. Hammerschmidt," Penelope said. "He's in the pharmaceutical business."

"A druggist?"

"He's not a druggist. He's opening a whole chain of drug stores in Alaska and I'm going

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to be his personal secretary." She softened when she saw Olin's mournful reaction. "I'm sorry, I really am. But I told you I had to think of my future, remember?"

"I remember," Olin said, without pride.

The next day he took Krebs on a field trip. They went to the railway terminal together and tried to recreate the circumstances. Krebs warned Olin that he had attempted the same procedure on his own, wandering past the banks of lockers for hours on end, always to no avail.

Olin's encouragement didn't help. Krebs simply couldn't remember.

It began to look hopeless.

That night, skimming through treatises on memory that he had previously thought worthless or impractical, Olin felt the greatest sense of discouragement he had ever known.

Then Sigmund Freud helped him out.

He had never attempted to analyze the *reasons* behind Krebs's forgetfulness. But rereading Freud and his works on the theory of the unconscious, he suddenly became aware that Morgan Krebs felt *guilty* about whatever it was he had hidden away. That was it! He didn't *want* to remember the number.

But how was he to break the barrier Krebs had erected? Olin wasn't an analyst. He couldn't hypnotize Krebs into loosening his hold on the truth. What would make him cooperate?

Then it dawned on him.

Drugs!

When Penelope heard what he had in mind, she gasped.

"Olin, I couldn't do such a thing!"

"You could do anything if you tried," Olin said, stroking her arm. "All you have to do is remember the name. Sodium pentathol. You don't even have to remember it—I'll write it down for you, honey sweetheart. And you can tell your nice friend Mr. Hammerschmidt that you absolutely *have* to have some of it or you can't possibly go to Alaska with him."

"But what are you going to *do* with it?"

"I'm going to *help* Mr. Krebs, sugar, I'm going to help my patient—I mean my pupil—remember something very, very important. And when he does, it's going to make all the difference in the world to you and me."

"I don't see how," Penelope said. But he could see she was wavering.

Penelope had surprisingly little trouble obtaining the drug from Mr. Hammerschmidt. Ob-

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viously, the threat of going to cold Alaska without her warm hourglass body was enough to make him produce the drug without asking too many questions.

On Friday morning, the day before her scheduled flight to Juneau, Olin called her from his office and told her to stand by for exciting developments.

When Krebs entered his office and learned what the Professor had in mind, he blanched.

"I don't like needles!" he said bluntly.

"You needn't worry," Olin said. "I was a medical corpsman in the army. I gave thousands of shots, and I never lost a patient." He gave Krebs a toothy smile meant to be reassuring.

Krebs resisted for another fifteen minutes, but then, spurred on by Olin's promises of immediate results, finally relented.

Olin gave him the injection.

He had never administered a "truth serum" before, but he had seen enough movies to know that he was supposed to ask his subject to start counting backward from 100. Krebs scowled and said, "Nah," and promptly fell asleep.

For a moment Olin thought his plan had failed, but then Krebs stirred and said, "I didn't do it, officer."

Olin leaned over the sofa and said, "Mr. Kingston, listen to me." He got a snore for a response. "Morgan!" he said loudly. "Morgan Krebs! Listen to me!"

"Yeah, what is it?" his pupil said testily. "What do you want?"

"I want you to remember something, Morgan Krebs! I want you to remember the day you walked into the railroad station carrying a small black suitcase! Do you remember it?"

"So what?" Krebs said with hostility, his eyes still closed.

"You *do* remember it, don't you, Morgan?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"You knew you had to get rid of that suitcase, didn't you, Morgan? You knew the police were closing in on you!"

"Dirty stoolie pigs!" Morgan shouted, kicking his legs against the arm of the sofa.

"You went to the lockers, didn't you, Morgan? You picked out a locker, and you put the money into the slot, and you placed the little suitcase inside. Is that right?"

"Yeah. I had to get rid of it. They were after me!"

"You took the ticket, didn't you, Morgan? What did you do with the ticket? Did you throw it away so the cops couldn't ever find it?"

"Yeah!"

"That means you committed

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the ticket numbers to memory, is that right? You thought you could remember those numbers without any trouble, didn't you?"

"Yeah! Anybody can remember a few numbers!"

"Of course you can, Morgan! In fact, you can remember it right now!"

"No—I can't!"

"You *can*," Olin said, licking his dry lips. "All you have to do is look at the ticket—look at the ticket in your mind!—and you can see those numbers plain as day. Can't you, Morgan? Plain as day!"

Krebs's face was getting wet. There were beads of sweat in the scar on his chin.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah. Plain as day!"

Olin began sweating himself.

"You see them, Morgan? You *see* the numbers?"

"Yeah, I see them!"

"What are they? What are the numbers?"

A smile was softening Krebs's thin lips.

"Five, zero, one, one," he said dreamily. His whole body seemed to relax. "Locker number five, zero, one, one, combination number two, two, five."

A great sense of peace seemed to descend over the man on the sofa. He was so content he drifted off to sleep again.

But his contentment couldn't match Olin Mearns's sense of triumph. In fact, Olin was so elated he decided to telephone Penelope Walz right then and there, with Kingston snoring smilingly on his sofa.

"You're not going to Alaska, sugar baby," he said. "You're going to Palm Beach, Florida, where it's nice and warm. You're going to lie in the sun with your Olin and turn brown as a little berry."

"Florida!" Penelope said. "Oh, Marlon, wouldn't that be wonderful! But how can you afford it?"

"Pack your bags again," he chuckled. "Only this time pack for warm weather, sweetness."

An hour later Krebs woke and sat up.

"What happened?" he said groggily. "What happened, Professor?"

Olin looked at him sadly and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kingston. The sodium pentathol was my last resort, and I'm afraid it failed."

"You couldn't make me remember them numbers?"

"No," Olin said. "It just didn't work. But I have one good piece of news for you."

"What's that?"

"I'm only charging you half the fee," Olin said smugly. "I feel it's only right."

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Krebs's burly shoulders slumped so far down he looked almost puny.

Olin waited for an hour after Krebs left the office. He was in no hurry. He didn't even bother to write the numbers down. He knew he could trust his memory. He always had. Once again he felt pride in his ability, confidence in the future.

The police found Penelope's name and address in Olin Mearns's pocket notebook, which explained why they called on her that night.

"But I don't understand," she whimpered. "How could anything like that happen to Olin?"

"We thought maybe you could explain it, Miss Walz. What made him open that locker? And when he did, why did he take that bag out of it? Do you know?"

"It wasn't *his* locker," Penelope sobbed. "It belonged to a pupil of his—a man named Tibbs. No, sounded more like Crabs."

"Krebs? Morgan Krebs?"

"That was the name. What was in that suitcase, anyway?"

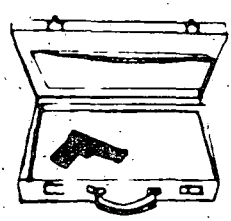
"Something Krebs didn't want any inspector to find when he opened the locker. Usually he left those little beauties in telephone company offices, after hours. He's got a hate on the phone company, but he never wanted to *kill* anyone."

"Kill anyone? You mean he was a *killer*?"

"Too bad your friend didn't remember who Krebs really was. If he had he wouldn't be pasted all over the terminal now. He should have remembered what the newspapers called Morgan Krebs."

"What was that?"

"The Mad Bomber of the Bronx."



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a NEW Scott Jordan story by

HAROLD Q. MASUR

The newest adventure of Scott Jordan, lawyer-detective, and another fast-paced, hard-hitting, tight-packed yarn of criminal legalities, legal criminalities, and assorted financial shenanigans. . . We all know, sometimes to our sorrow and frustration, that computers can make mistakes. But is the legend true, really true, that banks never make mistakes? The legend flourished when accounts were kept by human hands. But today, alas, even your friendly neighborhood bank is likely to be computerized. . .

THE $1,000,000 DISAPPEARING ACT

by HAROLD Q. MASUR

"Doctors!" Colonel Jaeger said. "Trying to soft-soap me. But I can read the signs. Morphine and cobalt. They might as well put it in writing. So I know the score and it's imperative to get my affairs in order at once. That's why you're here, Counselor."

His nurse had phoned my office, relaying an urgent request for my immediate presence at Manhattan General. I'd been handling various legal chores for Colonel Donald Jaeger ever since he retired from the Corps of Engineers to start his own construction company. But I hadn't seen him in almost a year and his appearance shocked me. He was gray, pitifully dwindled, the bones prominent in his fleshless face.

"What did you have in mind, Colonel?"

"A new will."

"What happened to the old one?"

"Tore it up after Lucille and I separated. That wife of mine!" He made a face. "The one I married two years ago.

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Senility, myopia—no fool like an old fool. She gave me two years of hell before we split up. Too busy for a divorce, so she's still my wife, and I want to make a new will cutting her off cold."

I shook my head. "You can't do that, Colonel."

He bristled. "Are you telling me what I can or cannot do with my own money?"

"It's in the statutes, Colonel. The law does not permit a man to leave his widow penniless. Unfair to the taxpayers if she has to go on welfare."

He exhaled in disgust. "You're a lawyer. I'm paying you for advice. Let's have it."

"The law provides for a minimum, at least one-third of the estate."

He digested it without pleasure, then shrugged in resignation. "All right, so a man has to pay for his mistakes. So she gets one-third of three million. Not bad for a measly two years of marriage."

"Any charitable bequests?"

"No, sir. I am not an eleemosynary institution. All the rest, residue, whatever you lawyers call it, goes to a niece. Suzy Bemis. Haven't seen much of the girl, but she's the last of our blood line, and I want her to have the money."

"Any instructions about your construction company?"

"It's no longer part of my estate. Sold it a few months ago to one of those conglomerates. In the process of phasing myself out when this abomination hit me. I want you to handle probate, Jordan. No strange lawyers dipping their paws into the till."

"I'll put it in the will. How about an executor?"

"Suzy would be able to handle it with your help. You'll find her in the telephone book."

"How much time have I got?"

"I want that paper signed, sealed, and witnessed this afternoon." He closed his eyes and sank back exhausted. "All right, Counselor, get cracking."

I went back to my office and dictated. My secretary skipped her lunch hour. At two o'clock Donald Jaeger's Last Will and Testament was neatly stapled into a blue document cover. I took it back to the hospital, enlisting Jaeger's nurse and one of the residents as witnesses. When the formalities were completed, the colonel showed me a double row of false teeth in a bleak grin.

"Any questions," he said, "talk to Sam Blake. Sam is the auditor at Jaeger Construction and knows more about my finances than I do." Suddenly he winced and the doctor leaned

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over to give him a shot.

He was going under fast when I looked back from the doorway. "Hang in there, Colonel," I said softly and left.

Two days later he was dead.

I attended the funeral services. The widow, Lucille Jaeger, sat in the front row, sleek and brittle, her tearless eyes darting suspiciously around the chapel. I recognized the man at her side, a lawyer named Victor Knebel, and felt what I always feel whenever our paths crossed, instant and total hostility.

People were gathered in the aisles, talking in hushed whispers. I made inquiries and someone pointed out Sam Blake, a slender clerical-looking man with a lined and anxious face. I approached and introduced myself.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Jordan," he said. "The Colonel mentioned your name. He said you might need some assistance and would be getting in touch with me. If I can be of any help at all—"

"I'd appreciate it. Could you spare some time tomorrow? I'll be at my office all day."

"Mid-afternoon would be fine."

"I'll expect you. Is Mr. Jaeger's niece here?"

"I was just talking to her. Let me get her for you." He separated a girl from a small group and brought her over. Suzy Bemis had a fine-boned oval face and vivid blue eyes shadowed at the moment with sadness.

I said, "May I offer my condolences, Miss Bemis? My name is Scott Jordan. I was one of your uncle's lawyers."

She nodded gravely. "Poor Uncle Don. I didn't even know he was ill. I didn't know anything until Mr. Blake called and told me about the funeral."

"If it's any comfort, Miss Bemis, he spoke to me about you before he died."

She seemed pleased. "He was always so busy. I didn't think he ever thought of me."

"Oh, he thought of you, all right. In fact, you're the principal legatee and the executrix of his will."

Her eyes widened. "But—but what about Lucille?"

"Didn't you know they had separated? Your uncle disliked the woman intensely. He left her the minimum allowed by law, but he did not want her involved in administering his estate. Incidentally, I'll be handling probate."

"I hardly know what to say. I never expected to be an heiress." She tilted her head and regarded me quizzically. "Are you capable of defending yourself, Mr. Jordan?"

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"Now there's a non sequitur, Miss Bemis. How do you mean?"

"I mean, have you ever met Lucille Jaeger?"

"Not socially."

She gave me a pitying look. "Then brace yourself. Lucille is not going to like this. I'm not sure I care to face up to her myself. Would I be allowed to waive my share?"

"Miss Bemis, by working hard all his life your uncle managed to accumulate considerable property. He had the right to distribute that property in any way he liked. Would you frustrate his final testament now?"

She blinked. "Well, no, not if you put it that way."

Organ music floated toward us and a mortuary assistant beckoned everyone to please be seated. "May I call you later in the week?" I asked.

She nodded, smiled fleetingly, and took a seat in the front row as far from Lucille Jaeger as possible. The services were brief and I got out ahead of the mob. I was halfway down the block when Victor Knebel and his client caught up with me.

"You didn't waste much time, did you, Jordan?" he growled. "Filing that phony will before Jaeger was even cold."

"Not phony, Knebel. It meets every testamentary provision required by law. And how long did you want me to wait?"

"A decent time, Jordan, a decent time." Knebel was a broad-beamed balding man with a voice like a foghorn. "We're going to contest it, you know."

"On what grounds?"

"Undue influence."

"By whom? Neither I nor the only other legatee besides Mrs. Jaeger had seen the deceased in over a year. His nurse will testify that he sent for me and that I spoke to him for less than twenty minutes. When did I have enough time to exert undue influence?"

"The niece," Lucille Jaeger broke in vehemently. "That Suzy Bemis. She's been seeing him secretly. I won't sit by and let her have my husband's money. We'll fight you all the way to the Supreme Court."

Knebel said, "We'll prove a lack of testamentary capacity. The colonel was old, sick, under stress, in pain, unable to think clearly. He was *non compos* and in need of a guardian."

I gave him a horse laugh. "That line won't even get you to first base, Knebel. Jaeger's doctors were in constant attendance. He had nurses around the clock. They will testify that his mind was sharp and logical right up to the very end."

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He compressed his lips. "Er, this thing can be settled out of court, you know."

"No way, Knebel. No discussions. No settlement. I owe Jaeger an obligation to see that every provision in his will is carried out to the letter and I intend to do just that."

Lucille Jaeger said acidly, "We're wasting our time, Victor. This little man needs a lesson. Let's go."

She was on her way. Knebel gave me a lingering narrow-lidded look, then went after her.

Sam Blake knew exactly what I needed. He appeared at my office the next afternoon with several lists of prepared figures. He spread them out on my desk and said, "The colonel never believed in maintaining a large cash balance. He was always investing in common stocks, industrials, and utilities, occasionally some high-yielding bonds. As you can see, the estate now comprises a very substantial portfolio. At the current market it is worth somewhere in the neighborhood of three million dollars."

"That's a nice neighborhood. How do we stand on taxes?"

"Unavoidable, Mr. Jordan. With some concessions to the widow." His finger traced the list, pausing to indicate where subscription rights were still pending and should be exercised, where certain bonds were approaching maturity. It was a complicated situation, making Blake's continued advice indispensable.

"If you can spare the time, I'd like to retain you officially as accountant for the estate."

He agreed promptly, a rueful twist to his lips. "I'm available. I can give you all the time you need."

"Are you leaving Jaeger Construction?"

"By request. Now that the colonel is gone, the new parent company is cleaning house. They're putting in their own men."

I made a quick decision. "Sam, I have a spare room temporarily available. It's yours until we close out the Jaeger estate. You'll have a desk, a telephone, and a midtown address for arranging interviews."

He sat for a moment, blinking. "I—I gratefully accept."

"My secretary will give you a key so you can come and go as you please."

Victor Knebel had decided not to contest the will. Whatever his problems, he was not an idiot. He realized the futility of his position and made no attempt to block probate. So in due course the will was admit-

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ted to probate and Suzy Bemis received her letters testamentary as executrix for the estate of Donald Jaeger, deceased.

I had seen Suzy half a dozen times, partly business, partly social, always enjoyable. She was employed by an advertising agency, writing copy and television commercials. She was splendid company, bright and light-hearted, and now in my office, expecting her for lunch, I found myself waiting with a high degree of anticipatory pleasure.

At the restaurant she regarded me curiously and said, "You told me to keep the afternoon free. What sort of assignation did you have in mind?"

"No assignation, Suzy. Business. After lunch we have an appointment at the Gotham Trust, lower level, with a state tax representative who is going to record every item in your uncle's safe-deposit box. We will then remove the contents and you will open a checking account as executrix of the estate."

"Using what for money?"

"A balance of fifteen hundred dollars in the colonel's account. From there we proceed to a brokerage firm where you will offer the securities for sale."

"Is it a large estate?"

"Suzy, your uncle left approximately three million dollars, one-third of which goes to Lucille, and the balance, after your share of the taxes, is yours."

She gasped. "I—I had no idea."

"Well, you're rich. Are you having dessert?"

"Just coffee. If I get fat, you won't take me out any more."

The Gothan Trust was around the corner on Fifth Avenue. The state tax man was waiting for us. Half an hour later, my brief case bulging, we went upstairs to the office of Mr. Henry Wharton who examined our documents and opened an estate account on Suzy's signature as executrix. Wharton congratulated her and said he hoped she would become a permanent depositor.

Outside I flagged a taxi and we rode down to a building on Wall Street. We took an elevator to the tenth floor. Zachary Bernard was waiting for us. He took one of Suzy's hands in both of his own and said, "All this and money, too? Miss Bemis, I'm delighted. Will you marry me?"

I said, "Don't get carried away, Zach. Looks aren't everything. She's perverse, ill-humored, and quarrelsome."

"That's not true," Suzy said. "I'm an absolute delight."

"I know—a place where we

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don't even need a license."

"Stop poaching, Zach. We have business to transact."

"Business is my life's blood. The conference room is back here." Zachary Bernard, Ph.D. in Economics, was a bear-shaped man with a beatific smile that opened wide when I spilled stock certificates across the table. He shuffled through them.

"Some of this merchandise may be worth holding, Counselor."

"No advice, please. The testator's widow has to be paid off in cash, so liquidate the lot."

"We'll need certain documents—state tax waivers, letters testamentary, death certificates, stock powers."

"You'll have everything by tomorrow afternoon."

"Then I'll study the list and start unloading at once. Just permit me some discretion in timing."

Victor Knebel was on the horn every day demanding a full accounting of the colonel's assets and xeroxed copies of every brokerage transaction, making sure the widow got her full one-third interest.

The first batch of securities sold brought checks for $1,000,000. I called Suzy and she came over and we brought them to the Gotham Trust for deposit. I told her I would be out of town for at least a week negotiating the purchase of a factory site for a client.

Actually it took ten days.

Less than half an hour after I returned to the office, Victor Knebel marched in, his jaw set at its normally truculent angle. "You were away," he accused, "and your secretary hasn't sent me any additional confirmation slips."

"That's right," I told him. "Because no additional stock has been sold."

"What's holding up the works?"

"Market conditions. We're waiting for an upturn."

"My client is impatient. She wants that estate wound up without delay." He consulted a small notebook. "According to my figures you've already sold one million dollars' worth of securities."

"Your addition is correct."

"What happened to the proceeds?"

"They've been deposited to the estate account."

"May I see the bank statement?"

I have a normally low flash-point, but this troglodyte was getting to me. I buzzed and asked my secretary for the Jaeger folder. She had filed an envelope mailed from the Gotham Trust while I was out of

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town. I tossed it over. Knebel opened it. His eyes narrowed stonily as he scanned the statement.

"There's been only one deposit," he said grittily. "Fifteen hundred dollars. What happened to that million bucks?"

He tossed the statement back. I glanced at it and saw only the initial transfer from the colonel's savings account. And the closing date was well after the brokerage checks had been deposited.

"You said the money had been deposited to the estate account," Knebel snapped. "Then show me the duplicate deposit slips. I want—" He reared back. "Where are you going?"

I was on my feet and moving. "To the bank," I said, almost bowling him over.

He was trotting along at my heels, out of breath, when I pushed through the bronze doors of the Gotham Trust and headed for Mr. Henry Wharton's desk. I placed the deposit slips and the monthly statement in front of him. He studied them.

"Seems to be some kind of mistake," he said.

"To say the least. Your statement fails to credit the Jaeger estate with one million dollars. Please note that these deposit slips bear the bank's official stamp."

"If there has been an error, Mr. Jordan, it will be rectified on your next statement."

"No, sir," Knebel broke in. "It will be corrected now. At once. We have a right to know what happened to that money."

Wharton sighed, picked up his phone, and spoke earnestly for a moment. Then he stood up and walked away. Knebel kept pacing the room, his lips tight. After a while Wharton returned. He sat down, looking noncommittal. He coughed once and cleared his throat.

"Gentlemen, we have a problem. Our computers have apparently credited this one million dollars to someone else's account."

"Mr. Wharton," I said, "*we* don't have a problem; *you* have a problem. You will simply charge the other account and credit the money to the estate."

"I'm afraid we can't do that, Mr. Jordan."

"Why the hell not?"

"The money has already been withdrawn."

I stared at him. "Well, damn it, get it back!"

He blinked. "The holder of the account seems to have disappeared."

"What!" Anger reverberated in the sudden high pitch of Knebel's voice. "You listen to

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me, mister. That money was properly deposited. We have receipts. It was in your custody. If the bank bungled, the bank is responsible."

Wharton gazed expressionlessly at the ceiling. "Well, now, I just spoke to our attorneys and they are not entirely convinced of our liability."

Dark blood suffused Knebel's face. "If those slick Wall Street lawyers think they can get you off the hook they've got a loose connection. We'll sue. We'll expose the bank's shoddy bookkeeping, its defective equipment, its incompetence and irresponsibility, and in the end you'll have to make good."

Incredibly I found myself in complete agreement with Victor Knebel. "Mr. Wharton," I said, "just how did your computers happen to make this mistake?"

"The computers did not make a mistake. They did exactly what they were programmed to do. They correctly credited the money to the account number on your deposit slips."

"I'm afraid you just lost me."

"Those numbers are printed in magnetic ink, scanned by the computer, and automatically credited to the appropriate account."

"Are you saying that the numbers on our deposit slips belonged to someone else's account?"

"Precisely, sir. It is a highly sophisticated system and it does *not* make mistakes."

"Well, damn it, the bank supplied those deposit slips and they bear the number the bank gave us."

"Not so, Mr. Jordan. They bear the number of an account belonging to a man named Edward Sloane."

"Then you printed the wrong number on our slips."

"We printed the correct number," he said firmly. "I have here the slip for your initial deposit of fifteen hundred dollars. Now look at the subsequent slips for your million dollars. The numbers do not coincide."

"Then the error was made by your printer."

"Impossible. Once the type is set, it cannot change by itself. If the first slip off the press is correct, all others would be exactly the same."

Victor Knebel could not contain himself. He glared at me and said in a clogged voice, "Jordan, if you're pulling a fast one, I'll have you disbarred. I'll turn you over to the District Attorney. This is fraud, embezzlement, misappropriation of fiduciary funds. As a matter of fact, I'm going to lay it before

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the D.A. right now." He wheeled and went storming out.

I sighed and turned back to Wharton. "Who does your printing?"

"Empire Bank Stationery, Incorporated."

"How long have you been using them?"

"As long as I can remember."

"Have you ever investigated their background?"

"They have no underworld connections, Mr. Jordan, believe me. Their integrity is unimpeachable." He sat up and looked me directly in the eye. "I am going to state categorically at this time that we did *not* supply the Jaeger estate with those incorrect deposit slips. And I think you should know that the bank is going to disclaim all responsibility."

"Mr. Wharton, you wrongfully turned that money over to a Mr. Edward Sloane. Now you say you cannot locate him. Why not?"

"Because the moment we realized what happened we tried to block his account. It was too late. The money had been withdrawn. We called his hotel, the Sutton Towers, and were informed that he had given up his suite and left the country."

"When did he open the account?"

"About two months ago. And after his account was credited with those brokerage checks he began making heavy withdrawals."

"And nobody became suspicious?"

"Mr. Jordan, the Gotham Trust is a major bank. We are literally flooded with transactions every day we're open. Deals are frequently consummated in cash. If a man's balance covers the request, we honor his withdrawal. We do not inquire into motives. That is neither our function nor our obligation."

"Can any of your employees describe this Sloane?"

Wharton shrugged. "I doubt it. They see too many faces."

I kept asking questions, but apparently I had milked Mr. Henry Wharton dry and when I left I did not shake his hand because the bank might in the near future be at the other end of a lawsuit.

So by some clever piece of legerdemain $1,000,000 entrusted to my care had seemingly vanished into thin air.

The manager of the Sutton Towers was a fussy little man with an air of perpetual harassment. "I have a rather vague recollection of the man," he told me. "Mr. Sloane had only one distinctive feature, a Mexi-

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can-type mustache. He seemed quiet and reserved, and his hair was turning gray. He rented a small suite on a month-to-month basis and paid with checks drawn on the Gotham Trust. After the bank called this morning I spoke to the housekeeper. She tells me that he seldom slept at the hotel."

"How long did he stay?"

"Only two months. Then he phoned to say that he was canceling the suite because he had bought some property on one of the Caribbean islands and was going there to live. His clothes had already been removed."

The Caribbean, I thought, was the last place on God's green footstool that Mr. Edward Sloane would ever be found. I thanked the manager, left, and took a cab down to Hudson Street.

Empire Bank Stationery, Incorporated had a full floor in a solid old building. In an office soundproofed against the constantly clacking presses a Mr. Louis Neiderman squinted through his trifocals at one of my cards. He was a bent and withered old gnome with a quirky smile.

"Attorney-at-Law," he said. "So, Mr. Jordan, somebody is suing me?"

"No, Mr. Neiderman."

"Then what? You're drumming up clients?" He chuckled, advertising an advanced case of emphysema. "More than fifty years ago I started this business, a storefront on Houston Street, one small hand press, and maybe twice in my life I needed a lawyer. So what's on your mind?"

"Mr. Henry Wharton of the Gotham Trust suggested that I speak to you."

"So it must be about those Jaeger deposit slips." He shook his head. "It couldn't happen. Not in this shop. We printed only one batch of those slips, and we pulled proofs, which are still in the file. They are absolutely, positively correct. So once the type was set, Mr. Jordan, how could it turn out with different numbers?"

"Do you supervise all the work yourself, Mr. Neiderman?"

"Me? I'm retired. My son runs the business, with the help of our foreman, Eric Braun."

"May I talk to your son?"

"Next week maybe. He's on vacation, a cruise, somewhere in those Greek islands."

"How about Braun, the foreman?"

"Eric is home sick with the flu, a hundred and two fever. Why do you think I'm here? At my age I need this headache?"

"Would you let me have his address?"

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"Why not? What can it hurt? He will tell you what I told you. Empire Bank Stationery does only quality work."

"I believe you, Mr. Neiderman. As you say, what can it hurt?"

"It can hurt plenty. The flu is catching. Maybe you should take a flu shot first." He gave me an address. "You want I should call him and tell him you're coming?"

"If you would, please. I should be there in fifteen minutes."

He was dialing near-sightedly when I left.

It was a converted brownstone in the East Village. But I never got close enough because a police barricade had blocked the area. Three radio cars, flashers rotating, were haphazardly parked. Two patrolmen guarded the entrance.

On the opposite curb a small crowd of onlookers craned their necks. I joined them and spoke to a young man in faded jeans, his eyes alight with excitement. "Somebody knocked off the Dutchman," he told me. "An old geezer named Braun."

"Are you sure?"

"He bought it all right. A neighbor lady found him. I hear his skull was bashed in. Must've been some junkie looking for an easy score and didn't know the Dutchman was home. Hey, look! They're bringing him out now."

Morbid curiosity is not one of my weaknesses. I cleared out, trying to look casual and inconspicuous. But I felt uneasy and troubled. With Braun dead a primary source of information was gone forever.

I stopped at a phone booth, got through to Suzy Bemis, and briefed her on the latest developments. She detected the note of worry in my voice. "Can we be held responsible for all that money, Scott?"

"It's something that may have to be ironed out in litigation."

"I really don't care about the money."

"Lucille cares. And the Surrogate cares. Our probate courts take a very sharp interest in how decedents' estates are administered. Besides, a man has been murdered and I think there's a connection."

There was a long silence. She said earnestly, "I'm not worried, Scott. I have confidence in you."

It was nice to hear, but as I left the booth I felt like an aging Don Quixote with a spear of straw in a palsied fist. I did not want to be involved in a homicide.

As it turned out, I had no choice. Detective Lieutenant

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John Nola rang my bell that evening. He nodded curtly and waited for me to step aside. In my living room he handed me a card. It was my own professional business card.

"There was a special price on a print order of one thousand," I told him. "I used to pass them around rather freely."

"Yeah. You passed this one to a Mr. Louis Neiderman of Empire Bank Stationery. You also made inquiries about the company foreman, Eric Braun. And you left Empire to visit Braun."

I sighed. "And now Braun is dead. Neiderman must have told you that he tried to phone Braun while I was still in his office and got no response. So Braun was already shelved."

"I'm not accusing you, Counselor. I'm asking for your version."

"I went there, Lieutenant. But the place was crawling with cops, so I simply turned and split."

Nola sat down and lit one of his thin dappled cigars. "All right, Counselor. Fill me in. Why did you want to see Braun?"

I gave it to him, chapter and verse, the whole scenario.

"One million dollars," he said. "Missing."

"Along with a man named Edward Sloane."

"Is it your impression there's some connection between the missing money and the death of Braun?"

"It seems like a logical conclusion." I looked at him hopefully. "Perhaps your boys found a valise full of money at Braun's apartment."

"They found a heavy brass candlestick with Braun's blood on it and a few partials." He looked sour. "When did we ever solve a case with even a good set of identifiable prints anyway?"

"You queried the other tenants?"

"Yes. One of them saw a stranger on Braun's floor."

"With a Mexican-type mustache?"

He nodded. "Fitting the description you got of Sloane at the Sutton Towers. My guess is that he's long gone from this city. Nevertheless, we'll keep looking." He stood up and said from the door, "I expect you to keep me informed of all developments as and when they occur."

Victor Knebel rang the next day and said that he was bringing Lucille Jaeger to my office for a conference on safeguarding the balance of her husband's estate. She was convinced that my stewardship would lead to additional disasters and was in-

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sisting on supervision. He hung up before I could tell him what I thought of the idea.

Ten minutes later I had a visitor, a thin flinty gent who presented credentials. Mr. Hobart Prime, Frauds Division, Internal Revenue Service. I was not due for an audit, however. After some preliminary sparring Prime directed his inquiries toward the Jaeger estate. He seemed well informed about the current status of our account at the Gotham Trust.

Finally he said, "I take it you are acquainted with a lawyer named Victor Knebel."

"To my great sorrow, yes."

"Would you be willing to help your government?"

"In what way, Mr. Prime?"

"We have a situation, Counselor. The government received a letter informing it that Knebel would be flying to Montreal on Friday. His purpose, to visit the branch office of a Swiss bank in order to open a numbered account and deposit illegal funds in the sum of one million dollars."

I sat erect, my adrenalin pumping. "A letter from whom?"

"Anonymous. Here is a copy." He proffered it, saying, "We often receive tips of this nature. We pursue all leads, regardless of source. Our investigators learned that the only case in Knebel's office involving a sum of that size was the Jaeger estate. Further investigation led to the Gotham Trust and the information that an employee of the bank's printing contractor had been murdered. That brought Lieutenant Nola into the picture. He suggested that I contact you and he promised to meet me here this afternoon."

I barely heard him. I was staring at the letter, feeling a sudden chill. A familiar defect in the type had caught my eye. It had been typed on my own office machine.

"We checked the airlines," Prime said. "And Knebel does have a reservation with Air Canada for Montreal on Friday morning."

I forced myself to pay attention. "Mr. Prime, how would Internal Revenue benefit? Even if you got your hands on that million, it still belongs to the Jaeger estate."

"There will be a sizeable inheritance tax, Jordan. The government intends to make sure that all the money is available." He smiled. "Could I see a complete inventory of the estate?"

I buzzed Sam Blake and asked him to gather his files on the colonel's affairs. Prime and Blake were both accountants and the two men juggled figures

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knowledgeably between them. They bent their heads together, Prime interrogating and Blake answering with numbers.

They were still going strong when my intercom announced the arrival of Victor Knebel and his client. I passed the news to Prime. "Have them join us," he said. "Tell them I am making inquiries about estate taxes."

Lucille Jaeger sailed in ahead of her lawyer. She nodded curtly at Blake and fixed Prime with an imperious eye. "We have an appointment with Jordan. You'll have to come back later." He identified himself and she snapped, "Well, you'll get only a minimal tax from me. A widow is entitled to allowances."

"You may not get much yourself," Knebel told her. "Not if Jordan keeps handling the estate."

Mrs. Jaeger was fissionable material and Knebel's remark touched her off. She cut loose with a shrill and bitter indictment, attacking my competence and my integrity. Then she turned to her lawyer. "I know, Victor, I know. I promised to let you do the talking. Go ahead."

Knebel focused on Prime. "Are you aware, sir, that a huge sum of money is missing from the estate account?"

"I have been so informed."

"Well, our chief concern now is to make sure the rest of Colonel Jaeger's estate remains intact."

"Internal Revenue shares your concern, Mr. Knebel. I would suggest then that you find yourself a good lawyer."

"Me? But I am a lawyer, sir."

"Let me quote an old aphorism: 'The lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client.'"

"What! What are you talking?"

"I am talking about your prospective flight to Montreal on Friday of this week. Would you care to discuss the purpose of that trip?"

"Montreal? I have no intention of taking any trip."

The door behind him opened and I saw Lieutenant Nola slip quietly into the room, encompassing the scene with a quick circular sweep of his eyes.

Prime leveled a finger. "Then please explain why you made a reservation for such a flight on Air Canada."

Knebel stiffened. "I made no such reservation!"

"The company's records prove otherwise."

"Then the company's records are mistaken. Why in God's name would I want to go to Canada?"

"Your intention was to visit

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the branch of a Swiss bank where you could open a numbered account and deposit one million dollars. Does that sum sound familiar to you?"

Knebel blanched. Sudden anger wrestled him out of his chair. "That's a lie! A damned vicious slanderous lie! I demand to know where you got that information."

"We received a letter."

"From an anonymous source, no doubt. I wouldn't be surprised if Jordan himself mailed it. Trying to take the heat off himself."

"Then how would you explain this little item?" Nola said, stepping forward, holding up his hand, and displaying a stage prop. It was a false mustache with drooping corners.

A touch of spirit gum, powdered hair, and cotton in the cheeks could effectively alter a man's appearance. And it would fit the description of the missing Edward Sloane.

"I don't have to explain it," Knebel said. "It's not mine."

"It was found in the glove compartment of your car."

"Then it's a plant, a frame-up. Ask Jordan."

I said, "I think he's telling the truth, Lieutenant. The letter implicating Knebel was typed here in my office." In the enveloping silence all eyes turned in my direction. Nola moved to peer over my shoulder. "Look at that *W*, John. Slightly off center, with a tiny break in the upper right serif. A unique characteristic of my machine."

"Are you saying *you* wrote the letter?"

"Not me and not my secretary. Which leaves only one other candidate." I looked at Blake. "How about it, Sam?"

He was staring at me, his face suddenly waxy.

"You had access to my typewriter," I said. "And access to my files. You were bitter. You felt that Colonel Jaeger had let you down by selling his company. All those years of work and a new management arbitrarily gives you notice. That rankled, didn't it, Sam? And it started you scheming. You decided to plunder the colonel's estate.

"So you concocted an ingenious plan to deceive the bank's computer system. You approached Eric Braun, made a deal, and one night, alone at the plant, he printed up counterfeit deposit slips for the Jaeger estate, but bearing an account number acquired by you as Edward Sloane. You substituted those slips for the real ones in Jaeger's file and the computer credited our deposits to Sloane's account. Then, before we received the bank's

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statement you withdrew the money and Edward Sloane ceased to exist."

"You're making a terrible mistake," he said in a rusty voice.

"Then you should have no trouble convincing a jury. How much did you pay Eric Braun?"

"Ten thousand dollars cash," Nola broke in. "We found the money hidden in Braun's apartment."

"How about it, Sam? Will they find an equivalent sum drawn from your own bank account?"

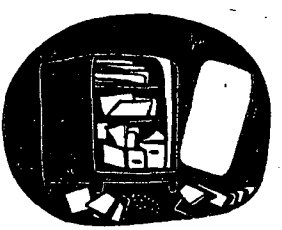
"It—it had nothing to do with Braun."

"Then he died for nothing. He was putting the bite on you for more, wasn't he, Sam? And you knew it would never stop. So Braun had to be liquidated. And you did it with his brass candlestick."

His mouth worked, perspiration bathing his ashen face.

I said, "You tried to lay a false trail by implicating Knebel. Writing an anonymous letter, making an air reservation in Knebel's name, planting that mustache in his car. All for nothing, Sam. Because you made a fatal mistake. You failed to notice that small flaw in one of my typewriter keys. Oh, they'll nail you all right. They'll get an identification from somebody—the manager of the Sutton Towers, an employee at the bank, a neighbor of Braun's. And they know how to search. They'll take your place apart, board by board. Don't think for a moment they can't find that one million dollars."

Blake looked at me in despair, then he bent over and covered his face with his hands. His ragged breathing was the only sound in the room.



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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"It started as a simple case"—a murder with five credible witnesses, all making positive identification of the killer. It turned into an impossible case—one of the toughest cases Captain Leopold ever tackled. . .And we should warn you: keep your mind sharp and your wits alert—or you too may believe in ghosts! . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD AND THE GHOST-KILLER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It started as a simple case, without a hint of ghosts or impossibilities—Lieutenant Fletcher's case, really, with Captain Leopold along only because he'd been working late that night and Grant Tower was on his way home. The time was 9:25 and downtown was deserted except for the usual street people. Some of them were standing around outside the 20-story building—which qualified as a Tower in Leopold's city—when their car pulled up, and for a wild moment Leopold feared the one closest to him might ask for his autograph.

The trouble was on the 15th floor and a uniformed cop was waiting when they came off the elevator. "Cleaning woman here in the building, Captain. Martha Aspeth. Her husband shot her."

Fletcher was already bending over the body of a middle-aged woman, sprawled in the doorway of an insurance office. There was blood beneath and around her, soiling the freshly polished floor. "Any witnesses?" Leopold asked.

"Five women who work with her," the officer said. "They all saw it happen. I've got an APB out on the husband."

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More technicians were arriving, to photograph the scene and dust for prints. Fletcher straightened up from the body and said, "At least three wounds, Captain. Maybe four."

Leopold nodded. "Let's talk to some of these women."

A stout white-haired woman with rolled stockings and a dumpy-looking print dress stepped forward. "I was right next to her! I saw the whole thing!"

Two white-coated morgue attendants had arrived with a stretcher, but they stood aside while the medical examiner checked the body. "I was on my way home," the M.E. told Leopold. "Doc Hayes takes over at nine. Hell of a thing, grabbing a man on his way home. Going to take that telephone out of my car."

"I was on my way home, too," Leopold said. "Cheer up." Then he led the woman to a sofa in the open office. "What's your name?"

"Hilda Youst. Martha and I started together over at the bank building. She was like a sister to me."

"What about her husband?"

"They didn't live together. He wanted younger ones. Can you imagine that? Martha was only forty-two and he wanted younger ones!"

"Had they quarreled before?"

"All the time!"

"Up here?"

"Sure! He came up regularly, usually on paydays. Wanted money for drink and women."

"Was tonight a payday?"

"No."

"Exactly what happened?"

"It was"—she glanced at the wall clock—"about twenty-five minutes ago, just after nine o'clock. He got off the elevator and asked one of the girls where Martha was. She was in here with me and she heard his voice. She said, 'God, not him again,' and she went to the door to see what he wanted. He just pulled out his gun and started shooting."

"He didn't say anything first?"

"I think he called her a filthy name."

"How many shots did you hear?"

"Four, I think."

"Then what happened?"

"He ran out the fire door and down the stairs. I phoned the police. The other girls were in terrible shape. They never saw anything like this before."

"Did you?"

"Did I what?"

"See anything like this before?"

"No, of course not! But I'm older. I been around more."

"Would you recognize the killer if you saw him again?"

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"Kurt Aspeth? Of course I'd recognize him!"

Leopold found Lieutenant Fletcher talking to the other four witnesses. Three of them were Puerto Rican girls, barely out of their teens. One was close to hysteria, her body shaking with sobs. Leopold noticed that the photographer and the medical examiner had finished their jobs. The body was covered now and the white-coated men were lifting it onto their stretcher.

"They all tell the same story, Captain," Fletcher reported. "He got off the elevator, asked Miss Sanchez here where Martha Aspeth was, then pulled out the gun and fired the moment he saw her."

"It seems clear enough," Leopold decided. "I guess we can leave the details to the rest of the men. We'll want statements from all five witnesses, of course, and from relatives. Find out where Kurt Aspeth lives and put someone on the address, in case he goes back there."

"I'll take care of it, Captain," Fletcher assured him. "You go on home now."

Leopold grinned. "I keep forgetting it's your case. See you in the morning."

The morning was in May, with golden sunshine and a spring warmth that robbed him of energy. Leopold simply sat in his office, wondering as he gazed out the window if this bout of spring fever was a sign of increasing age or merely a return to youth. He was still thinking about it when Fletcher came in a few minutes after nine.

"You know that killing last night, Captain?" Fletcher asked, settling into his favorite chair. "I've got some good news and some bad news."

Leopold grunted. "What's the good news?"

"We found Kurt Aspeth. His car hit a bridge abutment on the Expressway, about a mile from the Grant Tower building. He was killed instantly."

"What's the bad news?"

"The accident happened at 8:27—a good half hour or more before Kurt Aspeth is supposed to have killed his wife."

The city morgue was located across the street from police headquarters, in a faded brick building soon to be demolished for urban renewal. Doc Hayes was still there, on duty from the night before, following some rotating schedule which had always baffled Leopold. He'd known Doc for some years, through numerous homicides on which Hayes had functioned as acting medical examiner. He was a grim,

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efficient little man somewhere past 40, who sometimes looked as if he'd be more at home teaching at a medical college.

"What is it?" Hayes asked when he saw Leopold and Fletcher coming in. "That Aspeth thing?"

"Right. We're trying to establish a time sequence. The police officer's report lists the time of the accident as 8:27. We're wondering if that could be a mistake."

Doc Hayes shook his head. "That's the time, all right. He was killed instantly, so the officer didn't bother with an ambulance. As I understand it, a doctor pronounced him dead and they called for the morgue wagon. His body was already here when I came to work at nine." He consulted the book in front of him. "Checked in at exactly nine. Made the notation myself. Damn busy night—Aspeth and a hit-and-run and then Aspeth's wife. Damn busy."

"There's no possibility of error?"

"Error? The man is certainly dead, if that's what you mean."

"But what about the time? Could it have been an hour later?"

Doc Hayes snorted. "Daylight-saving time started three weeks ago. Our clocks are all correct. Besides, the officer's records couldn't be wrong, too."

"All right," Leopold said, moving to another possibility. "Are you sure it's really Kurt Aspeth?"

"*I'm* not sure," Hayes said. "I never met the man. But he was driving Kurt Aspeth's car, carrying Kurt Aspeth's driver's license, and Kurt Aspeth's brother identified the body early this morning."

"Brother?"

Doc Hayes nodded. "Felix Aspeth."

Leopold had a wild thought. "*Twin* brother?"

"Hardly. Felix is ten years older."

"Still, they might resemble each other. What's his address?"

Hayes looked it up in his records and gave it to him. "Now, get outa here, will you? I have to take my car into the garage and then get home for some sleep. This is supposed to be my day off!"

"Thanks, Doc." Outside, Leopold said to Fletcher, "I'm going to check on this brother. You get Hilda Youst and the rest of the cleaning crew down here to identify the body before it's moved."

"You think they will?"

"Who knows? Maybe the brother is pulling some sort of trick."

Felix Aspeth's address was an apartment building in a rundown section of the city.

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The neighborhood was racially mixed, sprawling through six blocks of what had once been a downtown college campus. The college, sensing change, had moved to the suburbs, from the city streets. The old buildings had become apartment houses.

Felix Aspeth answered the door with a suddenness that startled Leopold, as if he'd been waiting on the other side. "What is it?"

"Captain Leopold of the Violent Crimes Squad. It's about your brother."

Felix Aspeth grunted and motioned him inside. He was a tall man with stringy black hair and a black mustache flecked with gray. There was something a little seedy about him that matched the sparsely furnished apartment in which he lived. "I'm making funeral arrangements now," he said. "I can only spare a few minutes."

Leopold sat down gingerly on a straight-backed chair. "You know, of course, that your brother's estranged wife was shot to death last night, at just about the time of the fatal accident."

"Yes."

"Witnesses say Kurt was the one who shot her."

"I have no doubt of it. He was always a bit crazy on the subject of Martha. He was crazy to have married her anyway."

"I understand he was your younger brother?"

Felix Aspeth nodded. "Ten years younger. He was just thirty-one. They got married about ten years ago, when he was just out of the army. He picked her up in a bar one night. I told him that wasn't the sort of girl you married, but he wouldn't listen."

"How long had they been separated?"

"The whole ten years, off and on. One of them would walk out and then after a while they'd get back together again. There were no children, and he was never much of a worker. Martha was on welfare for a year before she got that job cleaning up at Grant Tower."

"You said he was thirty-one. She seemed older than that."

"She was. Over forty, I'd say. That's one of the reasons I was against the marriage in the first place. But you just couldn't talk to Kurt."

"There seems to be a time discrepancy of about an hour in our records. Though Kurt was positively identified as the murderer by five witnesses who knew him, the records of the accident bureau show the smashup occurred about thirty minutes earlier."

"I see," Felix Aspeth said.

"You see? Well, I *don't*." Leopold was growing irritated

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with the man. "Suppose you explain to me how that could be possible."

"Kurt couldn't leave this earth without settling the score with Martha. Call it love or hate or whatever you will, he had to take her with him. Martha was murdered by my brother's ghost."

When Leopold returned to headquarters he found Fletcher in his office with policewoman Connie Trent. "You look tired, Captain," Connie said. "Want some coffee?"

"I could use something. How about it, Fletcher? Did those women view the body?"

"It was quite a struggle, Captain. A couple of them just didn't want to look at him. But they all made positive identification. His face wasn't damaged in the accident, and they say there's no doubt about it. That's Kurt Aspeth, all right—the same man who killed Martha Aspeth last night."

Connie returned with coffee. "Fletcher said you had a hunch it was Aspeth's brother. Did you see him?"

"I saw him," Leopold said sadly. "He thinks his brother's spirit killed Martha, after the accident."

"Spirit? You mean, a ghost?" Fletcher snorted and dropped some sugar in his coffee. "I don't buy that, Captain. Ghosts don't run down stairs."

"And they don't fire pistols, either," Leopold agreed. "Whoever shot her, it wasn't Kurt Aspeth's ghost."

"How about the brother? Do they look alike?"

Leopold thought about that. "Not really, though Felix without the mustache might pass for an older version of Kurt. It's hard to say, never having seen Kurt alive. They look like brothers, I guess. No more than that."

"But in the excitement of the shooting, couldn't the witnesses have been mistaken?" Connie asked.

"Five of them? Not likely. Especially the older one, Hilda Youst. Nothing would shake her."

"Then the thing is impossible," Fletcher said.

"It happened," Leopold reminded him. "Which officer was first on the accident scene?"

Fletcher consulted his file. "Pete Franklin, a motorcycle cop. Good man."

Leopold glanced at his watch. It was just after three o'clock. "Connie, hop down to the police garage and see if you can catch Franklin. He must be on the four-to-midnight shift, and he should be coming in

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soon. Find out everything he knows about the accident."

"I'll even ask him if he saw any ectoplasm leave the body and head downtown," she said.

Officer Peter Franklin was tall and handsome, and Connie Trent did not in the least mind interviewing him. She found him in the garage adjusting his leather puttees and awaiting the arrival of the duty sergeant with the orders of the day. When she'd introduced herself, Franklin said, "I've seen you around headquarters. The prettiest policewoman in the department."

She ignored the compliment. "Captain Leopold's a swell man to work for. He took me on last year after I blew my cover on the Narcotics Squad."

Pete Franklin nodded. "I see Lieutenant Fletcher occasionally."

"Do you like riding a motorcycle?"

"It's great in the summer. Come winter I'm back in a patrol car."

"Captain Leopold was wondering about that fatal accident last night—Kurt Aspeth, the man who hit the bridge abutment?"

"I know. The car was a mess. I was only a few blocks away when I heard the crash."

"You were first on the scene?"

"The first officer. The only one, really. Some motorists stopped, and a doctor. He was dead, so I called for the morgue wagon on my radio."

"What do you think caused the crash?"

"Somebody told me today he'd killed his wife. I suppose he smashed the car deliberately. A lot of one-car accidents are really suicides."

"There were no bad road conditions?"

"No, except that it was dark, and that section of the Expressway isn't too well lighted."

"What time was it?"

"Around 8:30. That's in my report."

"You know Aspeth's wife wasn't shot till after nine?"

He frowned and scratched his head. "I heard there was some confusion about the times. It doesn't make sense. The witnesses must have been wrong."

The duty sergeant had arrived and Connie could see her time was running out. "One more thing. Which way was the car going on the Expressway—toward downtown or away from it?"

"Away from it. The guy'd just shot his wife, hadn't he? I figure he was trying to escape and just decided, the hell with it, and smashed up the car."

"Maybe," Connie conceded.

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"If we can just account for that time difference we'll be all set."

"I gotta go now," he said. He started to turn away, then had another thought. "How about dinner some night? I'm off tomorrow."

She was about to decline automatically, then said instead, "Sure, I'm free tomorrow night."

"Give me your address and I'll pick you up at seven."

Hilda Youst opened the door and stared at Leopold without recognition. "What do you want?" she asked.

"We met last night at Grant Tower, Mrs. Youst. I'm investigating the killing of Martha Aspeth."

"Oh, yes—Captain Leopold. I remember you now. Come in."

Like Felix Aspeth's, her apartment was in a poorer section of the city. But there the resemblance ceased. Where his had been sparsely furnished, hers was jammed with trinkets and trophies. One small corner table was covered with religious statues of all sizes and shapes, while a table in the opposite corner held a single large trophy with a golden figure on the top representing a woman in a long gown. She saw Leopold looking at it and explained, "I won a weight-watching contest two years ago. I lost the most weight of any member in the whole state."

"That's fine," Leopold said.

"I got a crown and a dozen roses. Then I came home and put the weight all back on."

"That's life, I guess. On and off. I wanted to ask you some more about last night."

"What about last night?" She didn't ask him to sit down, so he stood.

"You see, all five of you positively identified Kurt Aspeth as the murderer of his wife. And you identified the body at the morgue as being his."

"That's right."

"But he died around 8:30, and you didn't report the shooting till about 9:05."

"That's when it happened," she insisted.

Leopold sighed. "The thing's an impossibility, Mrs. Youst. Two things seem certain—Aspeth was dead at 8:30, and Aspeth shot his wife a half hour later. One element *must* be wrong. The killing must have taken place a full hour earlier than you said. Why did you wait an hour before summoning the police, Mrs. Youst?"

"But I *didn't!*"

He couldn't doubt her words. The idea of five cleaning women dancing around the body in some obscene rite for

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an hour before calling the police was just too preposterous. And yet, if he accepted her story, he was left with no one but Aspeth's ghost as the murderer.

"Maybe the shock was so great you lost all sense of time. An hour might have gone by without your realizing it."

"Impossible! For one thing, we have our schedule. I never reach the fifteenth floor till nine o'clock. That's where I was, so it had to be after nine."

"All right," he said. There was no attacking her logic. But as he started to leave, a new thought struck him. "If you just reached the fifteenth floor at nine, how was it that the floor was already freshly polished?"

She sighed, as if at his stupidity. "I said *I* got there at nine. The girls who do the floors work about twenty minutes ahead of me."

He left her standing in the doorway and went home to meditate on the ghost of Kurt Aspeth.

In the morning Fletcher had more bad news. "We checked out the fingerprints, Captain. The dead man really is Kurt Aspeth. He's got a minor record for drunkenness and assault."

"Is the body still at the morgue?"

"The brother claimed it. There's a funeral service this morning."

Leopold stared out the window, wondering what had happened to the bright May sunshine of the previous day. It was a good day for a funeral, but not much else. "We've hit a blank wall so far, Fletcher. Let's see what happened around 9:27 that night, at the time the accident *should* have occurred. Communications keeps a tape of incoming accident and trouble calls. Get it over here and let's play it. There has to be something we're missing, and I want to find it before the press gets onto this story."

But the tape that Fletcher produced an hour later seemed merely a jumble of radio calls and phone conversations. It took them some time to sort out the accidents from the crime reports, and this was what they heard, in part:

"*. . .8:05—truck-bicycle collision at Maple and York. Car 124 responding. . .8:27—car accident near the Wilson Avenue exit on the Expressway. Cycle 404 radioed in from scene. . .*"

"That must be Pete Franklin," Fletcher said.

"Let's hear what happened later."

"*. . .8:54—two-car collision at West and Saratoga. Injuries. Car 212 responding with*

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ambulance. . .9:02—Cycle 404 investigating possible hit-and-run fatality on Small Street . . .9:06—Police? A woman's been shot! She's been murdered! I'm on the 15th floor of Grant Tower! Come quick!. . ."

"That was Hilda Youst," Leopold said.

Fletcher nodded. "The patrolman got there first and verified it was a murder. That's when I was called along with the medical examiner, the technicians, and the morgue wagon."

"Let's see what else there is."

But there was no other accident recorded until "*. . .9:59—two-car collision on Park Place. Car 23 responded. Drivers will see own doctors. . .*"

"Nothing around the right time," Leopold grumbled. "What was that hit-and-run?"

"The boys are working on it. Terrible thing—a high school girl on her way home from the store, cutting across a narrow alley behind some apartment houses. Nobody even saw it happen. Some damn fool swung out of the parking area too fast, I suppose."

Leopold puzzled over the tape, rewinding it to play it again. Finally he gave it up. It was nearly time to start believing in ghosts . . .

Connie Trent was ready when Officer Pete Franklin rang her bell at seven. He looked different out of uniform—less handsome, somehow—and she felt a bit cheated.

"All set?" he asked. "Where do you want to eat?"

"Your choice." She knew his salary as a motorcycle cop would exclude the sort of places she really liked.

"I know a great place down on the Sound, if you like fish."

"Love it! Let's go."

Over an expensive dinner of lobster and white wine she began to change her opinion of Pete Franklin. His easy-going manner with women was something of an act, and he used money to compensate for some lack he felt in himself. "That cost you a lot," she said as they left.

"I'm celebrating. I may be coming into some money soon. Besides, it's a long time since I've been out with a girl as pretty as you."

As he pulled out of the parking lot, Connie asked, "Where to now?"

"It's a great night for a drive. Look, the moon's even come out from behind the clouds. Let's ride around a bit, then go back to my place and listen to records. How's that grab you?"

"Fine." She was already plotting excuses for an early

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escape, but it was only nine o'clock, just barely dark, and she could hardly ask to be taken home that early.

His apartment was on the north side of the city and they reached it a half hour later. He drove around back and pulled into an assigned space in the parking area. "This place must cost you something," she commented.

"It's not cheap."

He helped her out of the car and they headed across the dark asphalt toward the lighted rear entrance. Connie saw the figure in the shadows first, and she tugged at Franklin's sleeve. "Pete, someone's there!"

"Who is it?" Franklin called out.

The answer was a blinding blast from a shotgun that toppled Pete Franklin backward like a giant fist. Connie felt the edge of the shot pattern rip into her left arm and side even as she tried to pull her own gun free from her purse. Then she went down too, seeing nothing, hearing only the running footsteps that gradually faded into silence. . .

Lieutenant Fletcher had phoned Leopold at home as soon as the word reached headquarters. They caught up with Connie Trent in the emergency room at General Hospital, where a doctor was bandaging her wounds with professional ease.

"She's all right," he told them. "I removed eleven shotgun pellets, but none of them were deep."

Connie was trying to sit up. "Fletcher! Captain! What about Pete Franklin? They won't tell me a thing around here!"

"Pete caught the full blast in his chest," Leopold said quietly. "They couldn't save him."

"Oh, God. . ."

"Did you see who did it?"

"Nothing but someone standing in the shadows, waiting for him. I tried to use my gun—"

"Don't blame yourself, Connie."

She lay back and closed her eyes for a moment. Then she opened them and said, "He told me he might come into some money."

"What else did he say?"

"Nothing. But I think it was tied into the Aspeth killing."

Leopold frowned. "Why do you say that?"

"He said something odd when I talked to him yesterday. That's why I went out with him tonight—to find out more about it."

"What did he say that was odd?"

"That it was dark at the time Kurt Aspeth smashed up his

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car. But it doesn't get dark these nights till a little before nine. At 8:27, when the accident was supposed to have happened, there'd still be daylight."

"Thanks, Connie," Leopold said. "I think you've solved the case for us."

"But not soon enough to save Pete Franklin's life."

When they left the hospital, Leopold and Fletcher drove over to Small Street, a narrow alley that ran behind some old apartment buildings near the Expressway.

"A hell of a place to end your life," Fletcher said.

"Any place is," Leopold said. "What was her name?"

"Rose Sullivan. She was only seventeen."

"Pete Franklin again?"

"Yeah," Fletcher said. "We should have caught that on the tape. Cycle 404 responded to both accidents, even before a call came in."

"We had no reason to catch it. When he radioed in that he was investigating a 'car accident near the Wilson Avenue exit on the Expressway,' it naturally sounded as if the accident was *on the Expressway*. Actually it was here on Small Street, a half block from the Wilson Avenue exit. He must have been coming off the exit ramp on his cycle when he saw it happen. And see that fence down the end of the alley? I'll bet that overlooks the Expressway. He was still here on Small Street when Aspeth cracked up nearly an hour later on the Expressway."

"What do we do now, Captain?"

Leopold shrugged. "I guess we go back to the morgue."

Doc Hayes was on duty again, because it was after nine. He let them in himself and led the way to his office in the rear. "Quiet night," he said, "except for poor Pete Franklin, of course."

"What time did they bring him in?"

"Around ten. I was late getting here myself. Had a flat tire."

"Damn lot of car trouble lately, Doc. You were taking it into the garage yesterday, weren't you?"

"Yeah. Those things happen."

"Doc. . ."

"What is it?"

"Killing the girl was only manslaughter at worst. With Pete Franklin it's first-degree murder."

There was a sudden flash of wildness in Hayes's eyes and he started to move, but Fletcher was on him, handcuffing his wrists. "That's all for you, Doc," he said, a bit sadly . . .

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Connie Trent was released from the hospital the following morning and was in Leopold's office an hour later. "What's all this about arresting Doc Hayes? I can't believe it!"

"He killed two people, Connie," Leopold said.

"He shot Pete? And Martha Aspeth?"

"Pete, yes—but not Mrs. Aspeth. She was killed by her husband, just as the witnesses said. We spent our time investigating that case when we should have been investigating the hit-and-run killing of a high school girl named Rose Sullivan. You see, the answer to the problem of Aspeth's ghost was a very simple one—the times of the two accidents were *switched.*"

"But how was that possible? And why?"

"Doc Hayes made a full statement last night, after his arrest. You see, he goes on duty at the morgue at nine o'clock each night. He'd been visiting the apartment of a lady friend earlier in the evening and was pulling into Small Street in a hurry to get downtown when his car hit and killed the Sullivan girl. On that back street, at dusk, no one saw the accident. But Pete Franklin, cruising the area on his motorcycle, happened along just afterwards."

"What time was this?"

"Probably very close to 8:27, the time that was later ascribed to Aspeth's fatal accident. Franklin's first reaction was to radio in a report that he was investigating an accident. Once that report was on the record, as of 8:27, Doc Hayes's troubles began. He knew Pete, of course, and maybe he even knew that Pete wasn't above taking a little graft to keep up a nice apartment. Doc was in big trouble at this point. He'd killed a girl with his car, and if he admitted it he'd also have to explain what he was doing there. I guess he saw his marriage and his career both threatened in that moment, and he made a fatal mistake. He offered Pete Franklin money to let him go."

"And Franklin took the money."

Leopold nodded. "It was dark by this time, and the street is little more than an alley anyway. No one came along. Doc Hayes drove away and Franklin must have spent the next several minutes tidying up the scene—picking up bits of chrome or headlight glass that might have served as clues. Then he was ready to call headquarters on the radio and report a hit-and-run, which he finally did at 9:02. The only trouble was, there was still his

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8:27 report on the record. He'd called in an accident, nothing more, identifying it simply as being by the Expressway—which Small Street is. The detectives who came to examine the scene didn't know about the earlier call, or about the missing thirty-five minutes, but it was still on the record. That was when fate brought Kurt Aspeth onto the scene."

"He'd already killed his wife and was escaping on the Expressway," Connie said. "And he probably did hit that abutment deliberately."

"Could be," Leopold said. "Small Street dead-ends at the Expressway. Franklin could have seen—or at least heard—the crash from where he was. He got there on his motorcycle almost at once, saw that Aspeth was dead, and called for the morgue wagon. Only this accident he *didn't* report. This accident became the 8:27 accident he'd already radioed in to headquarters."

"But. . ." Connie still wasn't convinced. "What about the detectives investigating the hit-and-run? They must have heard Aspeth's crash, too. What about the other motorists who stopped? What about the morgue records?"

"The detectives already had their hands full. The motorists would never see the time on Franklin's report. The morgue records were easily changed by Doc Hayes. It was a one-car accident, remember, so there wasn't likely to be any court case where witnesses would be testifying. Franklin saw a lucky chance to switch the order of the two accidents and thereby explain his earlier radio report. Fortunately for him, he hadn't mentioned Small Street in the earlier report, only the Expressway. And luckily no other patrol car happened along while he was at Aspeth's wreck. Luck was all on his side, in fact, till he asked Doc Hayes for more money."

"But how did you know all this?" Connie wondered. "How did you know enough to arrest Doc Hayes in the first place?"

"When you repeated Franklin's remark about it being dark at the time Aspeth smashed up, we knew he hadn't died in the 8:27 accident. That had to be something else Cycle 404 investigated. But Franklin had only two accidents in the crucial period—Aspeth and the hit-and-run on Small Street. If it wasn't Aspeth at 8:27, it had to be the hit-and-run. Fletcher and I went over to Small Street last night and saw how close it was to the Wilson Avenue exit. So Franklin lied about the hit-and-run. Why? Only one answer went with his expecta-

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tion of money—he was blackmailing the driver."

"All right—but why Doc?"

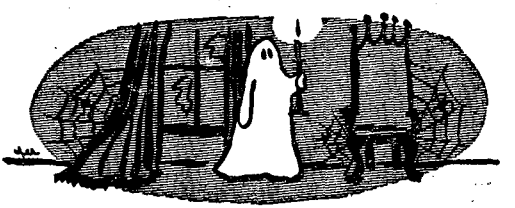
"Three things pointed to him. First, he lied when he said Aspeth's body came into the morgue before nine. Second, he told us he had to take his car into the garage, implying some necessary repair work. And third, at the time of the hit-and-run he would have been in his car, driving to the morgue. Circumstantial, sure, but it was circumstantial too when he said he had a flat tire that made him late for work while Franklin was being killed."

"You took a gamble accusing him on that evidence."

"I take gambles every day in this job, Connie. Just the way Pete Franklin did. After he thought of switching the accident times he had to phone Doc at the morgue and tell him to switch his records, too. The records were the important thing. The morgue drivers would never be asked, any more than those passing motorists. The time of Kurt Aspeth's death would be an unimportant fact buried forever in police files. It would have happened that way too, except for one crazy thing—Kurt Aspeth had just come from murdering his wife. When that fact became known, Franklin asked Doc for more money to keep quiet. And Doc got out a shotgun to pay him off."

"It kept building up, didn't it?" Connie said. "From an auto accident to bribery to murder. But at least it wasn't Aspeth's ghost on the prowl. I was almost beginning to believe that."

"So was I," Leopold said.



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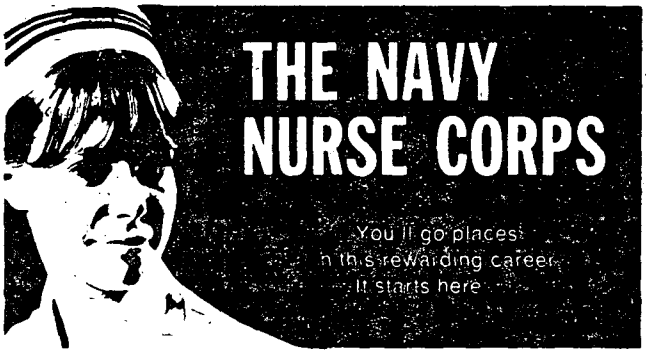

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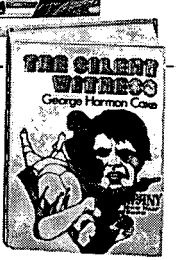

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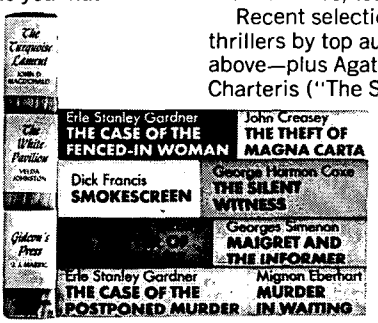

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